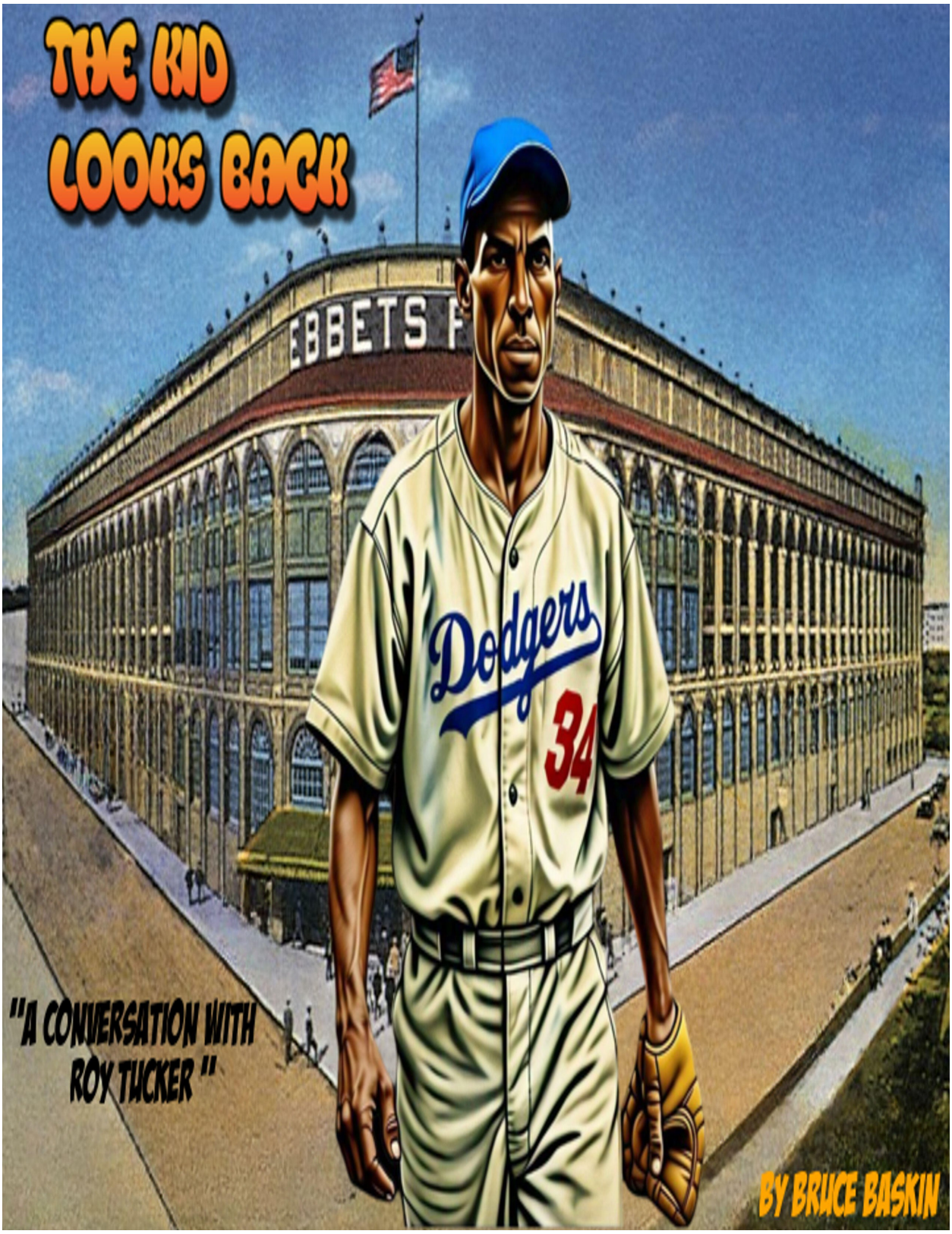
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"A CONVERSATION WITH
ROY TUCKER"
BY BRUCE BASKIN

THE KID LOOKS BACK

An Interview with Roy Tucker

Nicknamed "The Kid from Tomkinsville," Roy Tucker patrolled the Brooklyn Dodgers outfield between 1939 and 1957, playing one more year in Boston before retiring as a player following the 1958 season. He then went on to manage one year in the Red Sox' minor league system and served as a head coach in both college (earning an Associate's degree in the process) and American Legion Baseball for three decades before hanging up his spikes for good in 1990. He remained on the family farm he grew up on in rural Connecticut the rest of his life.

Although Tucker's on-field exploits have been documented for decades by John R. Tunis in a series of eight books, relatively little is known about the one-time pitcher who went on to earn mythical status after an arm injury forced him (and his bat) into the Dodgers' everyday lineup after he converted into an outfielder.

What follows is a transcript of an undated interview in which a very real Kid is interviewed by an unidentified male at his Connecticut farmhouse who turned a tape recorder on and began asking questions (the questions have been included in the text). A box containing several cassette tapes were discovered in the attic of the late former New York Telegram sportswriter Stan King, who covered the Dodgers while Tucker played and whose family was clearing out his Bedford-Stuyvesant home after King passed away in 2004. Family members say neither voice on the tape was King's.

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PREGAME

WERE YOU BORN HERE IN TOMKINSVILLE?

No, I was born downstate in Hartford. July 20, 1919. I was the last of four children, two older brothers and a sister. My nearest brother Al was ten years old when I was born and my oldest brother Forrest was a senior in high school then. My sister Nancy was two years behind Forrest, so I wasn't really close in age to any of them. I was what they call a “surprise” baby.

YOU HAD A BROTHER NAMED FORREST TUCKER?

Yes, that was his name, but no relation to the actor. Everyone called him “Fog” anyway. He was Forrest Tucker IV on my daddy's side. Forrest I was killed in the Civil War. Anyway, Fog and Nancy had already moved out by the time I started elementary school and Al moved out by the time I was in fourth grade so in a way I was an only child, at least while growing up.

HOW LONG DID YOU LIVE IN HARTFORD?

I spent my first ten years in Hartford. Normal childhood, I guess. I went to primary school there, church every Sunday, that sort of thing. It's where I started playing baseball. All the kids in the neighborhood would get together and play baseball in a vacant lot one block over between the Woods' and the Wielands' houses after school or during the summer. We might only have 4 or 5 per team but in a vacant lot, that's all we needed.

WERE YOU A GOOD BALLPLAYER EARLY?

Shucks, no. I was pretty bad. Awful, really. I didn't start playing until I was 8 years old, about two or three years after everyone else, and it really showed at first. But there was something about the game and I just took right to it, or it took right to me. I played whenever I could and got better over time. But at first? I was pretty hopeless.

Sometimes if I had a ball of my own, I'd walk to the field behind my school and just hit it by myself. Fungo-hitting, you know. I'd toss the ball up

in the air, hit it in one direction, walk after it, and hit it back. I'd spend hours doing that, even making up games in my head once I learned more about baseball. That's where I got my swing, I guess. At the field behind Bulkeley Grammar School.

WHY DID YOU MOVE TO A FARM IN TOMKINSVILLE?

My daddy became a stockbroker after World War I and he must've done pretty well because we lived in a nice house. Three bedrooms, which was bigger than usual back then. When I was 10, I came home from school one day and Momma was crying. Real hard. I remember it was a Friday afternoon because I had been thinking about playing baseball all day on Saturday.

I asked Momma what was wrong. She said that the stock market had crashed, Daddy lost everything and had jumped off the top of the building his office was in. Well, I'd seen that building and it had to be at least 10 stories high. I'm not sure I've ever had a worse day in my life, although that Christmas was pretty awful and the time I was captured by the Germans in World War II is right down there, too.

After that, we had to move. Momma had never had a job because she was raising us kids. The house hadn't been paid for so a man from the bank came to take it away. Her parents had both passed away so the only choice she had was to go to the farm Daddy had grown up on and bring me with her. Like I said, my brothers and sister had all grown up and moved out so it was just the two of us with Grandma.

I'd visited Grandma and Grandpa in the summer, of course, and would spend a week or two at a time, but I'd never imagined living here. That was a big year, 1929. And a bad one.

SOUNDS LIKE IT WAS A TOUGH ADJUSTMENT

Oh, it was. I'd left all my friends behind, had to go to a new school a couple months into fifth grade and went from living in the state capital to living on a farm. Everything in my life was different and it took about a year to get used to it. I obviously did because I've never really left except when I played baseball, but it was very hard at first and I hated it here.

HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO PLAY BASEBALL AFTER THAT?

Moving here a few weeks before Christmas meant no baseball outside because it was so cold and snowy. I remember all the snow our first winter here. The good thing was that the barn you passed by on your way to this house was there back then. This is a growing farm and not a livestock farm, although Grandma always had chickens for the eggs, so most of anything grown for market to be sold after harvest was gone by the end of the year. That meant lots of room during the winter, room for fungo-hitting. I had to learn to hit up the middle because I'd learned real fast what would happen if I broke a window.

That really helped when I got older because I never saw the kind of shift when I played for the Dodgers like Ted Williams used to see with the Red Sox, especially when they played Cleveland. Because the barn door I was hitting towards didn't have windows. You could say I learned to hit up the middle out of self-preservation, ha ha, because the extra chores I would've had made hitting a window a losing proposition.

BUT YOU STARTED AS OUT AS A PITCHER, DIDN'T YOU?

Funny you should ask. That first winter in Tomkinsville, I started pitching. After breaking a window in the barn by hitting fungos, I figured I'd better do something where I had more control over the ball. So I got a piece of chalk and drew what I believed was a strike zone on one of the barn doors after asking Grandma, then I got a big tape out of the little shop in the barn and measured out 60 feet and 6 inches from the door, dug a line to mark it like a pitching rubber and started from there.

YOU LEARNED PITCHING AT THE FULL DISTANCE AT 10?

Well, there wasn't anything like Little League back then so the only thing I knew was what grown-ups were using as a pitching distance. I'd never pitched in Hartford so it was all new to me. I'll tell you, that's a long way for a fifth-grade kid to pitch from. I probably didn't need to mark out a strike zone because it took weeks to even hit the door on the fly but by spring I was hitting it pretty regular. I didn't know anything about pitching but I knew how to throw a ball. I finally got some instruction in pitching the next spring and that really helped.

WHO TAUGHT YOU HOW TO PITCH?

That would have been Jess Moore's dad. Mister Moore had pitched semipro ball back in the Twenties and apparently was pretty good before he hurt his arm and had to quit. He'd really studied pitching, learned it from articles in The Sporting News and Baseball Magazine about Christy Mathewson, Grover Cleveland Alexander, Walter Johnson, guys like that. You may wonder what you'd learn from Johnson because you can't teach speed like that, but he was all about control. Makes sense. You can throw harder than anyone on the planet but you still have to hit the strike zone.

Mister Moore had kept some of those magazines and he loaned them to me, as long as I gave them back to Jess when I was done. I read everything I could about pitching and hitting, but it was the Walter Johnson article that really drove it home for me because of his emphasis on pitching over the plate. Good things happen when you throw strikes.

I learned how to pitch over the next few years, although I didn't throw anything but fastballs and changeups until I was about 13 or 14 because Mister Moore told me I'd ruin my arm if I threw breaking pitches too early. I eventually added a curve and a sinker by the time I got out of Legion ball but first it was all about fastballs and changes, hitting spots and throwing strikes. After I retired as a player and started coaching that's how I taught it too.

LIVING ON A FARM, DID YOU HAVE CHORES TO DO?

Oh, gosh, yes. There was always something that needed to be done, even in the winter when the crops were in. Grandma and Momma made sure of that. We had the chickens all year, you know, so guess who got to bring in the eggs and clean out the coop? I'd still do that for Grandma during the winter when I was home after playing in Brooklyn. I never learned to like that smell, but I got used to it. Grandma called it “the smell of money” because we had a lot of chickens and she'd sell eggs by the dozen to neighbors, but money is not what I think of about that smell.

This isn't a real big big farm, only 25 acres, so we had to be careful what we grew, when we grew it and where we grew it. We have five acres here for the house, barn, chicken coop and anything else. The other twenty acres were split into four sections of five acres each, three different crops and one sitting empty to give the soil a rest. Grandpa Forrest used to rotate the crops and the field, like his daddy and his granddaddy before him, and we still do it to this day.

Generally we stick with corn, potatoes, peas, green beans, spinach or lettuce. All food crops, or I should say, people crops. Grandpa apparently tried hay once but learned that he didn't make nearly as much money growing food for livestock as he did growing food for people and gave it up. Anyway, I had to help plow the fields for whatever crop was going to be grown for a certain year. Don't think that didn't build me up. Learning to pitch in the barn was easy compared to that.

DID THE DEPRESSION DETERMINE THE CROPS YOU GREW?

Very much. We had to make sure we were growing enough for us to eat at home. Always potatoes. Always spinach or lettuce. Always beans. We even used the fourth field for a couple years rather than give the soil a rest because there wasn't enough money coming in from three crops to make ends meet. You don't want to do that long or you overuse your soil, which is

what led to the Dust Bowl. We traded with neighbors who grew different crops, especially fruit like apples. Those were lean years for sure, but we did have enough to eat.

HOW DID BASEBALL FIT WITH CONDITIONS LIKE THAT?

First, we never had to live on the edge because the farm had been in the family for over 100 years so it was already paid off. No mortgage. We had enough food for Grandma and Momma to put three meals on the table. It might have been the same food a lot of the time, but it was food. Things were tight, but they weren't desperate because we always had enough.

I had to wear some clothes a year longer or until I grew out of them, but that was nothing new and everyone was in the same situation. Once I got to high school, I started working part-time at the general store and riding a bike delivering Western Union telegrams that came in there. There wasn't much business in such a small place, but it was a little bit of money and anything helped back then.

As for baseball during the Depression, it was kind of an oasis for all of us, a shelter from anything else bad that was going on. Grandma had an RCA radio that Grandpa had bought a couple years before he died and while it wasn't as nice as the radios that came out later, it could pick up the Boston and New York stations and we were able to listen to a lot of baseball games, especially the World Series. I liked the Red Sox at first but became a Cardinals fan because of the 1931 World Series. I loved Pepper Martin because it seemed like whenever something happened on the field, he was right in the middle of it.

That's when I started hearing about guys I'd eventually play with in Brooklyn, too. Jake Kennedy was with the Giants back then, Dave Leonard with the White Sox, Fred Foster was in Cincinnati before they started calling him “Fat Stuff,” Frank “Razzle Dazzle” Nugent was with the Phillies before I got to high school. It sure was something to eventually play with

men I'd grown up hearing about on the radio or reading about in The Sporting News.

DID YOU PLAY BASEBALL IN HIGH SCHOOL?

No. I couldn't. Jefferson High School was a little rural school, too small for baseball or football teams, just cross country in the fall, basketball in the winter and track in the spring. You have to understand Tomkinsville isn't really a “town” so much as a collection of small farms and one main street with three or four stores, a couple churches, a tavern and a post office. Barely big enough for a zip code. The school had all 12 grades in six classrooms before it finally closed during World War II and the students had to transfer to Middletown.

There was also an American Legion team in Middletown that I started playing for when I was 14 years old after my freshman year at Jefferson. Kind of funny that I spent four years playing Legion ball for the Middletown Braves in the Thirties and came back to coach them in the Seventies and Eighties. I got to play with some of my friends from school like Harry Peters, the Cousins brothers, Jim Harrison, Tommy Watson and, of course, Jess Moore. We didn't have enough players in Jefferson for a high school team but we made up almost half the Legion team. And Mister Moore was the coach. We had to wait until school was almost out to start playing Legion games, but June and July were always great months. We'd play all over Connecticut.

HOW DID YOU GET TO AND FROM GAMES BACK THEN?

Any way we could. We'd try to find two or three dads with trucks who could drive and just pile in the beds, five or six per truck. We'd pool for gas money, bring some fruit or corn or whatever from our farms to share and away we went. Roads weren't great back then; some were paved but a lot weren't and there was no such thing as a four-lane highway at the time. It could take a long time to get down to New London or Bridgeport because if you got behind someone slow, it might be a long wait to pass them and

having half a dozen teenage boys in the back didn't exactly pick up your passing speed.

We'd play games against nearby teams once or twice week but had to wait until the weekend for the longer trips because of the travel time, then we'd play doubleheaders to make up for it. Grandma did not like it at all when I'd have to leave at 8 on a Sunday morning for two games in Torrington or New Haven because that meant missing church. Sometimes when I'd get home at night and all I wanted to do was take a shower and go to bed, she'd be waiting for me and I got to hear a rundown of Pastor Bates' sermon that morning.

But we made our games, if not always on time. All but one Saturday in 1936. We had a doubleheader in Danbury, which is out west not far from the New York border. We only had one truck for that one so we could only bring nine players by cramming eight in the bed and one in the cab with the coaches, Mister Moore and Mister Cousins. I think we had to take turns breathing so nobody would pop out of the back because it was so tight.

We got a little past Waterbury when Mister Moore's truck broke down. I don't remember what caused it but we weren't going to go any further. Mister Moore stayed with his truck and tried flagging someone down for a ride back to a shop in Waterbury and the rest of us tried hitching to Danbury, but who had spare room for nine ballplayers and one coach?

Mister Moore was eventually able to get his truck towed with a rope tied to the back of another truck to Waterbury and got it fixed at a shop. Then he had to come back to pick us up because the driver of the other truck didn't want hundreds of extra pounds of Legion players to tow. We finally got back to Middletown by 10 that night and I didn't get home until 11, fifteen hours after I'd left for two games that we never played.

HOW DID YOUR MOTHER DIE?

Me and Momma were out planting crops early in 1937 when a big storm came out of nowhere and just drenched us. We'd been at the far end of the farm and were soaking wet when we got back to the house. I had a cold for a week after that but Momma came down with a bad fever that night. She was kind of frail and she'd get colds and things like that. Grandma and I thought this one would pass like the others but Momma got sicker as the night went on.

The storm had knocked out a telephone line so we couldn't call a doctor to help and Grandpa's old Model T was having work done on it so we couldn't take her to Middletown, where our doctor was, so we were stuck not knowing what was going on. Momma died early the next morning and we never did find out if it was the fever or something else because she hadn't been feeling well for a week or two before the storm.

It was March 2, 1937, in the middle of my junior year at Jefferson. After that, it was just Grandma and me and that's how it was for years. I've been blessed in a lot of ways, but growing up wasn't always easy.

DID THE DODGERS DISCOVER YOU PLAYING LEGION BALL?

If they knew who I was then, I wasn't aware of it. I only played Legion ball until just after my senior year. By that time, word was getting out that there was this kid pitcher in Middletown who could throw strikes, play third base and bat a little so I started getting picked up for occasional semipro games by a team in Waterbury in 1938. I enjoyed playing Legion with my school buddies, but I also played for the Waterbury Blues because the competition was older and I was getting $25 a game, $35 if I pitched. That was good money back then and Grandma and I could sure use it.

Well, there was one game in Waterbury that July when the Cuban Stars barnstorming team came through for a game and I was picked to pitch it. Bear in mind that while they weren't a Negro League team anymore, the Cuban Stars had players in their 30's and even 40's who'd been around a long time. You had to be pretty good to barnstorm for that

long because word got out if you weren't and nobody would book you for games.

Anyway, even though I was only 18, I'd learned a lot about pitching from Mister Moore and all those articles. I had four pitches by then: a fastball, curve, sinker and change and I could throw all of them for strikes. I never had a lot of speed but I had good control, knew how to change speeds and mix my pitches. That night, everything was working and I beat the Cuban Stars, 4-1, on a three-hitter and got a double and two singles.

As it turned out, Jack MacManus, who just bought the Dodgers that year, was at the game to look at our shortstop, Andy Pearson. Andy got a hit and played well in the field, but Mister MacManus decided he'd rather have me instead so he offered me $1,000 for the rest of the season.

We had to ask Grandma to sign for me because I was so young and it wasn't easy to convince her, but she finally agreed after Mister MacManus told her he'd assign me to Elmira in upstate New York in a Class A league with a team in Hartford so I'd never be far from home.

I learned later that Mister MacManus could be a pretty tough negotiator, but Grandma was nobody's fool either and wouldn't sign until he gave me a $350 bonus that she used to buy a new wood stove and a few other things around the farm. Maybe I should've let Grandma handle all my contracts.

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THE KID FROM TOMKINSVILLE I

HOW DID YOUR FIRST YEAR IN THE MINORS GO?

It was scary at first. Elmira had won two straight pennants and were in first place when I joined them. They were in the Eastern League, which was Class A at the time. It was pretty good baseball because back then there were still Class B, C and D leagues so there were quite a few veterans. My first start was a 5-2 loss in Hazelton. I was pretty nervous and didn't have my control but when I did throw strikes, they'd hit 'em back. Hard. Welcome to the pros. I did get a single that drove in a run so it wasn't all bad, but I had a lot to learn.

Jug Slavin was our manager and while he was a crusty old guy, he was pretty patient and kept me in the rotation the rest of the season. I did settle down and won seven out of nine games the rest of the way and had an ERA of 2.95. Not a lot of strikeouts, which were never my thing anyway, but I didn't give up many walks either. Hit about .300 and played a few games at third base when I wasn't pitching.

The team put me in a room in a boarding house that I shared with our left fielder, Chip Fiske, who was also my roommate on the road. When we were at home we played in an old wooden ballpark that burned down a couple years later. My “locker” was two nails pounded into the wall of the dressing room, one for my shirt and one for my pants. The stands were pretty rickety and I think the termites would've finished it off if the fire hadn't, but we got a few decent crowds. There were nights when over 1,000 people showed up, more than I'd usually see in Waterbury and a whole lot more than would show up for Legion games in Middletown.

The Pioneers did win the pennant that year, and the owner gave us all $100 bonuses and paid for a banquet at a roadhouse where every player got a certificate with their names in nice lettering. I look back now and it seems a little small time but back then, it was a big deal to me. Remember, I was a kid just off a farm in Tomkinsville, Connecticut.

WHAT WERE THE ROAD TRIPS LIKE?

Better than what we had in Legion ball. We'd pile up in this old bus and head out to places like Wilkes-Barre, Hazelton, Binghamton and Williamsport. The roads were a little better than I was used to in Connecticut because the cities were larger than the ones I played Legion games in, so they were usually paved. The bus was used up, though, and climbing up the hills going through the Adirondacks could be an adventure.

One time we headed straight out of Elmira after a game because we were starting a series in Trenton the next night. The driver had been drinking and wasn't in any better condition than the bus was. I don't know how far up we were at one point but it was a long way down when the driver fell asleep and scraped the guardrail, then woke up and steered hard to the left and nearly hit a truck coming down the mountain. He finally was able to stop but everyone who'd been sleeping was wide awake by then.

Jug's coach, the old third baseman Johnny Madigan, walked up to the front of the bus, slugged the driver in the jaw, knocked him to the stairwell and took over the wheel, shouting “If we're all going to die, I want to see it first!” I'm not sure anyone slept the rest of the way to New Jersey after that. Except maybe the driver.

WAS THE INVITE TO THE DODGERS' 1939 CAMP A SURPRISE?

Not to spring training itself because I was told near the end of the season in Elmira that they were going to bring me back for another year, but I was surprised to be assigned to the major league part of camp with the veteran players because I was a kid out of A ball. I figured they'd put me in with the Nashville or Montreal players.

I learned later that Gus Spencer, who was managing the Dodgers that year, didn't want me in the big league camp but Mister MacManus told him he wanted me there. It set off a big argument, which often happened with those two, but a manager can't overrule the guy who pays him so there I was.

WHAT KIND OF GUY WAS JACK MACMANUS?

He could be tough to deal with because he wanted things done his way, but his way usually worked pretty well for him. Mister MacManus was from Minnesota and he played college football there, then played baseball for a few years. Spiked Cobb once in an exhibition game when it was usually the other way around. Went into World War I as a private but was a colonel by the end of the war. He made money in oil during the twenties, lost it in the Crash, came back and built a radio empire during the Depression and was able to buy the Dodgers with that money.

The guy had drive like most others don't and there were quite a few people who didn't like him, but he knew what he wanted and kept at it until he got it. He was hard to shake a dollar out of, though, at least at first. My first full-year contract with Mister MacManus was for $2,000 in 1939 and this was after I'd made the Dodgers. Oh, and he tossed in a nice Crosley radio that I gave to Grandma to replace Grandpa's old RCA. That's it right next to you.

WAS YOUR TRIP TO FLORIDA YOUR FIRST ON A TRAIN?

A real train, yes. There were streetcars in Hartford when I was a little kid that were sort of like trains, but nothing like that one. That was a long, long trip for me, about two days to get from Middletown to Florida. I brought a couple of magazines to read on the way down but I was finished the first day. Had to sleep in coach, too, because the Dodgers weren't going to give a kid from their Class A team a sleeper.

It was very cold when I left Connecticut. Freezing. By the time I got to camp, though, I'd already taken off my coat for hours. It was a lonely ride because I wasn't with anyone I knew, but I liked seeing all the scenery on the way and I came to enjoy it by the end.

One of the reasons I retired from baseball was that airplanes were starting to be used for road trips in the Fifties and I hated flying. Still do. When Mister MacManus sold the Dodgers and they were moved to Los Angeles, there was no way I was going to keep going. Trains were great and I later worked things out so I could ride one from Middletown to Windsor Locks and back when I was coaching college ball in upstate Connecticut. Why drive when you can ride the rails?

ANY PROBLEMS WITH OLDER PLAYERS AS A YOUNGSTER?

At first it was tough, mainly because I was a threat to take some other pitcher's job. The guys who were secure like Raz Nugent and Fat Stuff Foster were okay because they knew they'd be in Brooklyn when camp broke, but fringe guys like Harry Norman and Sam Henderson could be hard to deal with because they were hanging on. Norman used to get on me quite a bit, calling me a “little punk” and “high school cannon fodder.” I don't think it helped when I hit him hard in intrasquad games, but was I supposed to strike out to make him feel better?

The position players were better, although Karl Case could be kind of a jerk at times because Gus would put me in right field late in games every once in a while and I showed I could hit when I got the chance. Most of them ignored me, though. Tom Swanson was okay and would talk to me but Swanny talked to everyone. Red Allen and Jerry Strong were okay, both being quiet guys. Dave Leonard was quiet, too, but he always had a tip for me when I was pitching to him. Harry Street was something else, though.

Harry was a shortstop from Philadelphia who'd played in Muskegon in 1938. He was two years older than me, just 21, but you'd never know it when he was on the field. Always talking, always making noise. “Hurry up and take your time!” he'd yell to the pitchers. Things like that. Harry was a totally fearless guy and acted ten years older than he was. No way he was going to take the manager's job at shortstop. There was a reason Gus was nicknamed “Gabby” himself, but Harry made himself noticed because you couldn't ignore him.

WHEN DID YOU KNOW YOU'D STICK WITH THE DODGERS?

I never really knew for sure through most of camp, but there was one exhibition game against Cleveland in Clearwater that made me think I maybe had a shot. It was in late March and cuts were coming. Gabby sent me out in the fourth inning to relieve Rats Doyle with the score at 2-2.

I thought I'd pitch a couple innings before being pulled because exhibition games are a chance to look at everyone, but I had my sinker working and the Indians were chasing it so Gus left me out there for five innings. I gave up just one hit in five innings, doubled in the bottom of the ninth and came in on Harry Steet's single to win the game, 3-2. Even Harry Norman didn't call me a “little punk” after that one.

But it would have to be the final exhibition game that made it a sure thing that I'd start the season in Brooklyn. We'd played our way north from Florida after the Clearwater game and were at Ebbets Park for a game against the Yankees. It was just an exhibition game that didn't count in the standings but the place was packed. I don't know if Gus was trying to show Jack MacManus up for making him keep me in camp even though I'd pitched pretty well for him, but Gabby sent me out to start in front of over 30,000 people against the defending world champions. Sink or swim, kid.

Well, my curveball was jumping that night. Just dancing. After I settled down pitching in front of so many people after playing to fewer than one thousand less than a year ago, I threw seven shutout innings on six hits. After that, they had to keep me.

THAT WAS JUST THE START OF THINGS FOR YOU IN 1939?

I had no idea what was coming. I thought I'd pitch in middle relief and maybe get the occasional spot start, but I think that game against the Yankees convinced Gus that I'd be able to handle the pressure, even at 19. He put me fourth in the rotation behind Raz Nugent, Rats Doyle and Jake

Kennedy and I was out there every four days. And I just kept winning and winning. It was amazing.

Dave Leonard deserves an awful lot of credit for that. He helped me a lot in training camp and after the season started, whenever I was pitching, he'd be catching. What a cool head that guy had back there. Dave was a Philly boy like Harry Street, but a totally opposite personality. Very quiet guy, but you listened to him because he'd been in the majors since 1923 when he came up with the White Sox and had played in three World Series.

Dave knew what he was talking about and I wasn't so dumb that I was going to question anything he wanted me to throw. If he'd told me to roll the ball up to the plate, I'd have sent a Brunswick instead of a Spalding.

But Dave was only catching when I was pitching and he was batting less than .200 in early June. Babe Stansworth was doing all the other catching and while he was a big guy and a good hitter, a catcher is going to get beat up back there if he's out there enough. Babe was taking his lumps, so the team released Dave and brought up Hank West from Montreal.

I was supposed to pitch the night they let Dave go and I pleaded with Gabby to let him catch me one more time against Cincinnati. I'll give Gus credit for saying okay because the Reds were in first, it was the first night game ever at Ebbets, Harry was going to run against Jesse Owens in a pregame race and a sellout was expected.

WAS IT A SOLD OUT GAME?

Oh, boy. As it turned out, there were so many people who wanted in that besides 32,000 crammed into the ballpark, there were thousands more milling around just to see the lights from Bedford Avenue. It was bedlam. Jesse Owens beat Harry racing around the bases in opposite directions after both started at home plate, and then the game began.

Just like it'd been all year, Dave called the right pitches, I was throwing strikes and managed to get a no-hitter two months after my first big league game and six weeks before my 20th birthday. It was a memorable night for everyone. And then Dave was going back to Philly.

WHEN THE INJURIES AND LOSSES STARTED PILING UP?

Not right then, but as time went on, yes. We'd win a game, lose a game, never going on a big streak one way or another but sort of treading water and not really going anywhere. Karl Case went into a slump and so did Red Allen, our big first baseman from Bakersfield, California. Gus was a pretty tightly-wound guy to begin with and you had to wonder if he was losing his self-control. Tom Swanson ignored a hit-and-run sign in St. Louis and homered over the pavilion in right and Gabby fined him after the game. Then there was the series in Pittsburgh at the beginning of August.

Razzle Nugent threw a three-hit shutout against the Pirates at Forbes Field and he went out to celebrate with some friends in town. Well, he was stinking drunk when he came back to the Schenley Hotel where we were staying. I don't know if it was the pressure getting to him, but he broke in the door of the room Harry Street and I were staying and started tearing up the room and throwing stuff out the window. Lamp, telephone, end table, you name it.

Harry had gone out so I tried to stop Raz by myself, but he was about 6'3" and 220 pounds and strong. Very strong. At one point he started to dangle me out the window and that's when the cops came in. It took four of them, but they finally were able to get the cuffs on and arrest him. The room was ruined, of course, but Raz was fined $500 and even worse, suspended for a month.

That whole Pittsburgh series was a disaster. We lost the final two games and it cost us Swanny with an ankle sprain, Jerry Strong was spiked during a play at third that put him out for three weeks, Bill Scudder broke his leg trying to make a catch against the wall by the light pole in left and

Fat Stuff Foster's arm went dead after Gus kept using him in relief night after night. By the time we got back to Brooklyn, we were a mess.

BUT YOU STILL KEPT WINNING GAMES YOU PITCHED?

Only by the grace of the good Lord. We had kind of a patchwork lineup out there after Pittsburgh. Alan Whitehouse took over at third for Jerry, Paul Roth replaced Scudder in left, Karl Case moved over from right to center as a fill-in for Swanny and Ray Gaines was brought up from Montreal to take Case's spot in right.

I was usually pitching to Babe after Dave was released. There was a lot of pressure on the pitchers because Raz was still out on his suspension and Rats Doyle was struggling that year. I sort of became the stopper for a while and I still can't believe I kept my winning streak up. I was 15-0 before I got hurt in late July.

HOW DID YOU GET INJURED?

It was pretty stupid. I'd beaten the Giants, 4-2, in a day game at the Polo Grounds, which was a tough place to pitch for me. We were in the showers after the game, sort of horsing around because we'd lost three in a row before that afternoon. Swanny had come back from his ankle sprain that weekend and he was next to me in the shower stalls when someone snapped a towel at him.

Well, he tried to avoid the towel but he lost his footing and knocked into me. I then lost my balance and fell to the floor on my right elbow, my pitching elbow. Everything went quiet and Doc Masters, the trainer, came in to check me out and I was taken to the hospital for x-rays.

There was no fracture but they said it was something called Epicondylitis. I'm still not sure what that is but the doctor at the hospital said I should just get some rest for a week or so and I'd be fine.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT? DID YOU GET REST?

I followed the doctor's orders. I'd show up at the ballpark every day and help out as much as I could left-handed, but I didn't do anything with my right arm. I sat out ten days in all before my arm felt good enough to go, so Gabby sent me out to start against Boston. And I had nothing. There wasn't any pain when I threw, but I couldn't get my pitches to break and I had a hard time finding the strike zone. When you're not a fastball pitcher, that's a problem. The Braves got five runs off me on five hits, including a homer, and I didn't get a single batter out before Gus brought in Fat Stuff.

Then we went out on a western road trip, starting in Chicago. I was scheduled to start the second game against the Cubs but while I was warming up at Wrigley I still couldn't get any hop on the ball, no break, and I was all over the place. Then my elbow started hurting so I had to stop. That's the last time I ever tried pitching in a baseball game. Everything was gone and I was done. Frenchie De Voe took my place, we got creamed, 9-1, and we dropped to sixth place. Nobody was thinking about the pennant at that point, just getting through the end of the season in September.

AND THINGS WENT FROM BAD TO WORSE FOR GABBY GUS?

Yes. Gus was a pretty high-strung guy, always hollering at guys. “Show some ginger, boys! Let's have a little fight out there!” Never a quiet moment. He'd come over from St. Louis and was used to winning, but that hadn't been the case in Brooklyn at the time and you could see it was wearing him down, especially after the Pittsburgh series.

Gus started drinking more than usual, which is saying something, and there'd be nights when you could hardly make out what he was saying. He saw the 1939 season going up in smoke and he took it very hard, very personally. The veterans like Jake and Swanny would tell Gabby that the injuries weren't his fault, but it didn't matter.

He'd rented a car for the series in Chicago, a big blue Cabriolet, because he knew a lot of people there. I guess that after a few drinks in the hotel bar, he got into that car and lit out from the parking lot for who knows where. I was sitting in the lobby talking to Eddie Davis, our second baseman, when the newspaper guys who'd made the trip started running out the front door, one after the other. First Sandy Martin from the *Post*. Then it was Rex King from the *Times*. Next, Jim Casey from the *Post-Gazette* came running through the lobby. Eddie called out, "Hey, Casey! What's going on?" He yelled back, "Gabby! Big accident with his car on the Parkway!" And out the door he went. To the hospital, I guess. Eddie and I looked at each other, but we couldn't say anything. And we found out later that night Gus had died in the ambulance. It was awful.

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER GUS SPENCER DIED?

We had one more game to play before moving on to Cincinnati for another series, so our third base coach, Charlie Draper, filled in as manager and Red Cassidy, who was our first-base coach, was like his second in command. There wasn't a pitching coach in those days but Fat Stuff had been around for years so he handled that. We ended up losing but I don't remember what the score was. Everyone was kind of numb. Gus was hardly loved by the players but we did respect him because he was the manager and he'd been a winning ballplayer. It was a shock to all of us.

We boarded the train to Cincinnati for three games against the Reds. We finished the series on a Sunday and Monday was a travel day, so we didn't get to Crosley Field until Tuesday afternoon for a game at 8. We all took a bus from the Rhinelander Hotel to the ballpark and brought our gear into the locker room, and who was there waiting for us but Dave Leonard? What a sight for sore eyes that guy was! He'd been named manager.

Dave called a team meeting right then and there. Said, "Sit down, boys. We need to go over a few things." Cool and calm as usual. He told us that we'd been going through a bad season and losing Gus that way was horrible, but we still had a month of games we had to play. He'd activated

himself to fill in Gabby's spot on the roster and Mike Loretti filled in at short that night, but he was calling up Harry Street, who'd been sent down to Knoxville so he could play every night instead of sitting with us.

Dave said he'd retire as an active player so he could focus on managing and Harry could take his spot on the roster. Then Dave said, “Let's go out and warm up and I'll post the batting order in an hour.” Just like that, back to business.

3

THE KID FROM TOMKINSVILLE II

HOW CONCERNED WERE YOU THAT YOU COULDN'T PITCH?

Who wouldn't be concerned? I'd made the majors as a pitcher but, 15-0 record or no 15-0 record, that was all in the past because I was through. I thought a lot about my $2,000 contract and wondered how long I could make that money last because I figured it was back to the farm for me. What good was a pitcher with a bad arm to anybody? The Dodgers could've cut me right then and there so they could bring up another pitcher from Montreal or Knoxville to replace me.

I figured that's what was going to happen and that I was going to be out of baseball a few weeks after turning 20. Some career. But Dave had apparently talked to Mister MacManus before taking the job and said that if I wasn't kept around, he'd stick with selling insurance in Philly and raising his two daughters along with his wife Helen. I didn't find out about that for a few years.

Dave pulled me aside during warmups our second night at Crosley Field and said, “I'm not giving up on you. You showed me in Florida that you can swing a bat. Let's see if we can turn you from a swinger into a hitter."

SO YOU STARTED BECOMING AN OUTFIELDER IN 1939?

Not right away, I didn't. I sat for all three games in Cincy and three more in St. Louis, although I did warm up in the outfield every night to get used to it out there. I'd played a little right in camp but was usually a third baseman when I wasn't pitching. Bill Scudder was still out with a broken leg so Paul Roth was in left while Swanny and Case were both back in center and right with Ray Gaines as the sub.

Dave worked on my hitting along with Red Allen, who hit line drives everywhere, not for a lot of homers but tons of doubles. Dave thought I would end up being the same kind of hitter as Red because I'd told him about growing up hitting straightaway in the barn and eventually trying to use all the field when I played in Legion. It made sense to pattern myself

after Red, who would always hit between .275 and .300 while getting his 30 doubles, 15 homers and driving in 75 runs. Very steady.

Dave did send me up as a pinch-hitter for Rats Doyle after we got home to Ebbets for a series with Chicago. It was the bottom of the ninth and Rats had pitched a great game, but the score was tied at 3-3 and Harry Street was standing on second after walking and stealing a base. I hit a 2-2 pitch between right and center field and Harry came around to score and give us the win. Afterwards, Dave said, “You showed no fear up there in that situation. That's half the battle for a batter and you just won that one. You're gonna be a hitter here.”

It didn't always go well, though. We were playing the Giants in the Polo Grounds in late September, just before the season ended, and were down 7-5 in the top of the ninth. We put together a little rally and had the bases loaded with two out. Jerry Strong had come back from getting spiked in Pittsburgh and was standing on third, Harry was at second and Babe Stansworth was on first. Raz had been knocked around a bit, but our pitchers were pretty much out of gas by then so he went eight innings.

Dave sent me up to pinch-hit for him and I thought one good swing could tie it up with Harry's speed at second. Well, I gave it three swings but I struck out to end the game. Boy, I sure heard about it from the stands on my way back to the dugout to grab my stuff and then make that long walk to the clubhouse in center field. One guy yelled, “You're better for getting outs as a hitter than you were when you were a pitcher, Kid!” Stuff like that.

YOU WERE “THE KID FROM TOMKINSVILLE” BY THEN?

Yeah. That started in May after I'd won my first four games. One of the newspaper guys came up with it. I think it was Sandy Martin at the *Post*. Another nickname they tried to give me was “Bad News” Tucker, but that never stuck. It was always "Tuck" or “Kid,” even after I hadn't been a kid in years, ha ha. It should've made me feel young but my legs would remind me as I got older that I wasn't a kid anymore.

HOW LATE IN THE YEAR WAS THAT POLO GROUNDS GAME?

Pretty near the end. We played the Giants three games there, then finished up with three against the Braves in Boston. I used to love pitching at Braves Field but hated hitting there. I was kinda glad that Dave had me sit most of that series.

WHAT WERE YOUR FAVORITE PARKS TO PITCH IN?

That one year? Well, like I said, Braves Field was probably my favorite to pitch at. The outfield was so big they called it “The Airport” and there'd sometimes be a breeze coming in from the Charles River that kept a lot of balls in that would've gone out at Wrigley or at the Polo Grounds. After I became an outfielder I didn't like it so much, but I just swung for line drives there and hoped for the best. Forbes Field in Pittsburgh was another one I liked pitching in, lots of room in the outfield and a really nice setting in Schenley Park. I'm not sure why, but I did pretty well at Shibe Park in Philly too. Maybe it was that tall spite fence in right field that kept a lot of balls in, but lefties never really bothered me there.

The Polo Grounds were kind of mixed. If you kept the ball away from hitters it was pretty good because it was a mile out to center and the power alleys were pretty far out there too. Down the lines? Murder. If you went inside to a batter who turned on it, the ball could go out in a hurry. I didn't like pitching in St. Louis because that pavilion in right field seemed closer than it needed to be and it was always so doggoned hot there. You like to die after six innings. Crosley was the same way, except it was the wall in left that cast a shadow.

HOW DID YOU LIKE PITCHING AT EBBETS FIELD?

To be honest with you, I never really enjoyed pitching at Ebbets. I mean, I liked the atmosphere and loved the fans there, but the field itself wasn't very big and the ball could go out anywhere. That wall in right could

hold some balls in because it was pretty tall, but sometimes they'd hit that angle at the bottom and ricochet God knows where. Karl Case said it took two years to figure out the angles but it wasn't easy. I found that out myself.

HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK AT YOUR ROOKIE YEAR IN 1939?

Lots of ups and downs. I went from being an unknown rookie forced on Gus Spencer in training camp to being sort of a sensation with that 15-game winning streak. Then there was that accident in the shower at Wrigley that basically ruined my pitching arm for good and all the doubt about whether I was finished as a ballplayer, but it went back up for the last part of the season when Dave kept me around to make a hitter out of me.
That's a lot for anyone to go through, not just a teenager.

I can't tell you how much Dave Leonard's faith in me meant. If it wasn't for that man, you wouldn't be sitting in this living room with me, that's for sure. I'd just have been another Tucker running the family farm.

WHAT KIND OF MANAGER WAS DAVE TO PLAY FOR?

Dave was almost the opposite of Gus Spencer. Gabby was a very emotional guy, reacted to situations as they came up and sorta flew by the seat of his pants in general. He might think ahead to who was coming up in the batting order or who he had out in the bullpen, but it would be an inning at a time and Gus might change his mind along the way. Gabby was an agitator so he'd get umpires and opponents riled up, which doesn't always work in your favor.

Dave was much calmer and quieter. If he went out to talk to an umpire, he wouldn't throw his hat or kick dirt or even yell. But when you could see his head bobbing up and down, you knew he was getting mad and if his veins started sticking out of his neck, watch out.

In two years he played with or managed me, I only saw him get thrown out of a game twice. We were all glad Dave was like that because he was

about 6'1" and a solid 200 pounds and I think the only players on the team who might have been as strong as he was were Raz and maybe Red Allen. You don't play catcher that many years if you're not half tough.

Dave thought three or four innings ahead because he always said that the most important number in baseball was 27, the number of outs each team had, so he'd think about how to prevent them for us and cause them for opponents. He kept his own scorecard, always looked at it and used it to wave his fielders around for certain batters. Dave was like Connie Mack that way, not very surprising because he played a couple seasons for the A's.

He was also like Mister Mack in that he'd never chew a player out, especially in front of other players. He'd wait until later and talk to a guy who'd screwed up. Frankly, there were men on the team who hated Gus because he'd show him up in the dugout or even out on the field, but that never happened with Dave. We liked playing for him because he'd never embarrass us and we always knew where we stood. Very low-key.

I wish Mister MacManus had appreciated how good he was, but they had a salary dispute after the 1940 season and it must've been bad because Dave took the Browns' job and most people wouldn't do something like that unless they were really mad. Guys who managed the Browns never lasted long but that's where Dave went. It only took three years before he quit, not long after leading them to their only pennant in 1944 and he went back to selling insurance in Philadelphia. Never managed another game even though he was only 43. What a waste. After Dave left, we had a couple tough seasons before Spike Russell took over.

WHAT DID YOU DO AFTER THE 1939 SEASON WAS OVER?

Pretty much what I'd do for the next 19 years. Went home to Tomkinsville, rested for a couple of weeks and started working out in the barn again when I wasn't working a tractor plowing up the land for next year's crops. After a couple years, I figured out how to do both without

getting worn out doing either. That first winter I overdid it and I'd be dragging at night and dragging when I woke up.

Once I learned to run the tractor for two or three hours in the morning, have lunch and then practice swinging the bat for a couple hours in the afternoon before doing some other chores, I stopped being so tired all the time. Like the Bible says, “All things in moderation.” It was Grandma who pointed that out one night when I barely had the strength to go to bed.

That winter was different because I used to spend most of my time working on my pitching with a little batting. This time it was all about my swing because pitching was out of the question from that point on. Jess Moore told me that when we both played for the Middletown Braves, his dad would drill a hole in a baseball, run a rope through it with a knot under the ball at one end and tie the other end to the rafters of their barn. Then, they'd swing the ball out and Jess would hit it coming in at all kinds of angles.

That was a really good idea, not just because I could practice my swing without worrying about breaking windows but because we also had a couple of milk cows that Grandma bought with some of my bonus money and if I'd ever hit one of them with a line drive, oh boy! You didn't rile her up.

Dave and Red gave me a piece of paper with things to work on at the end of the season, mostly about how to hold a bat for better control, breaking my wrists when the ball was right in front of me no matter what I was hitting, things like that. Sometimes I'd swing the ball out myself, once in a while Harry Peters' little brother would come over and swing it so I could concentrate on the batting and sometimes Jess, Harry and the Cousins twins and I would go out to a cleared field on one of our farms and Harry would pitch to me. Harry didn't have much speed and his control was so-so but he could throw a few different pitches, even a knuckler that danced a little, so I could see a variety of pitches. We'd do that for years until everyone got married and started families.

WHAT KIND OF CONTRACT DID YOU GET FOR 1940?

Given how things ended in 1939, with me being finished as a pitcher and the team only finishing ahead of the Phillies and Braves, I didn't expect much and when the contract came in the mail it was for $2,000, same as I'd gotten as a rookie. And that was if I even made the team.

Now, I'm a pretty modest guy and was raised to be humble, but I thought Mister MacManus could've done a little better than that. Before I got hurt, the crowds were a lot bigger when I was pitching, even more than when Raz went out there. I wrote back telling him that, and that I deserved something more because he wasn't sharing any of that extra ticket money he was making off me at the time. I did not sign the contract he'd sent.

Well, I did get another contract in the mail and this one was for $2,500 plus a $500 bonus if I played 100 games in 1940. That one I did sign because I could make fifty percent more if Dave put me out there in the field or as a pinch-hitter or pinch-runner two out of three games, which I thought I could maybe do if I picked up my batting.

It was a risk on Mister MacManus' part because nobody knew whether I'd ever be a good enough player to beat out Scudder, Swanny or Case in the outfield. I played quite a few games at third base in Legion and Elmira so I could play there if Jerry Strong got hurt again, but I don't think they brought me back to be a utility man because they already had Alan Whitehouse, who was a good one.

OFF TO FLORIDA IN FEBRUARY WITH A $2,500 CONTRACT?

That's what it was, with a chance for $3,000 if I got into enough games. I might've been the lowest-paid player on the Dodgers again but I also had everything to prove again, this time as an outfielder instead of a pitcher. Make or break time for a second year in a row and I wasn't even old enough to vote yet.

Things were different once I got to Clearwater. I hadn't known a soul when I'd reported in 1939 but this time, I knew most of the guys in the big league camp and it felt great when they'd say, “How you doing, Kid?” or “Good to see you back, Roy!” These strangers from a year ago had become my friends. It felt good to be able to say things like, “Have a good winter, Swanny?” or “Hiya, Whitey, ready for another year?” From individuals to teammates. Sometimes the best part of being a ballplayer is the friendships you make.

I should say something about our clubhouse manager, Chiselbeak. His real name was Machiavelli Di Muzio. I always wondered why his parents named him after Machiavelli, but nobody ever called him that, or even Mac. It was just Chiselbeak or Chisel because he had a nose that sort of fit the nickname. He’d apparently started out as a kid helping the groundskeeper out when Ebbets Field opened in 1913, became the clubbie by about 1920 and kept the job all the way until the team moved to California in 1958.

Chiselbeak was sort of like a father to me. To a lot of us, really. He knew most rookies are scared to death when they reach the majors so he’d look out for them a little extra because the veterans knew their way around the clubhouse and weren't always nice to kids they thought might take their job. A few resented that because they thought they should get the special treatment, but Chisel didn’t care. I think his own dad left his family while he was still in school, so he sort of adopted us. Called us all “Boy” even though he knew our names. I played with the Dodgers from 1939 to 1957 and Chiselbeak was there every year. Loved the guy because he took care of me and I could trust him with any secrets.

Not everyone from 1939 was back in Brooklyn, though. Mister MacManus had traded Sam Henderson and Mike Loretti to the Cubs for Roger Stinson, who'd had a bad time at Wrigley when the wind blew out but could throw four pitches and had a good shot at making the rotation. A kid who'd pitched in Atlanta in 1939 named Garland “Speed Boy” Davis that we

got from the Braves for one of our relievers, Tony Bareto, looked like he might do something.

Speed Boy only had a fastball and a curve and he didn't always find the strike zone with either of them, but you can't teach the way he'd make Babe's mitt go “Bam!” and kick up dust like that. If he could've learned another pitch and get them all over the plate, Speed Boy would've been a real find. He did stick with us for a few years and he had his moments, but he never put it together consistently. He did start throwing a change-up, but it didn't come in much slower than his fastball so it wasn't all that effective.

HOW DID SPRING TRAINING GO?

We had a pretty good camp with pretty much the same lineup and Roger and Speed Boy joining the rotation along with Razzle and Rats Doyle, who was in his last year as a starter. We played about 20 games in Florida and won half of them, then worked our way through the south and up the Mississippi River for a couple weeks playing the Cubs along the way. Mostly it was a chance for Dave and the coaches to give everyone a chance to play, especially the younger guys because they knew what the veterans could do.

I played all over the outfield after the regulars got their three or four innings in and I hit a lot in the upper part of the batting order to get more times up. I even started most of the games going up from New Orleans to St. Louis and did pretty well. I think for the spring I hit about .275 and hit three or four homers, which felt really good because I didn't hit any the year before and only hit a couple out in Elmira in 1938.

Dave and Red Allen kept working with me in Clearwater in the morning and by the time we headed out of Florida into places like Mobile and Biloxi, I was comfortable with what they had me doing so I didn't have to think about it. It was feeling natural, like I'd always swung that way.

I still had to work on tracking fly balls, but Paul Roth was a good defensive outfielder even though he wasn't very fast and he helped me. None of the starters did and Karl Case even acted like I'd better not ask. Case was hard to get along with, like he was always mad at something. I'd find it hard to be mad if I was making $10,000 a year to play a game like he did but some guys are like that.

Anyway, I spent most of 1940 learning how to be an outfielder and by the end of the season, I wasn’t too bad. I was on my way to being an everyday major leaguer.

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THE KID FROM TOMKINSVILLE III

YOUR 1940 SEASON GOT OFF TO A SLOW START, DIDN'T IT?

It did. The regular season started on the road with three games in St. Louis, then three more in Cincinnati and we lost four of our first six before we got home to Ebbets. The first three or four weeks were like that. A win here, a loss there. We were hitting pretty well, but the pitching just dropped off after Raz and Roger, who turned out to be a good pickup. We got to May and were playing in fits and starts.

Then MacManus pulled off a trade that might have turned our season around when he sent Bill Scudder, a minor league infielder named Joe Guenther and $15,000 to the Phillies for Elmer McCaffrey, a big left-handed farm boy who could throw hard and was a good hitter too. Elmer had played in three All-Star Games and he really knew how to pitch. It happened on a off-day before Pittsburgh came to Brooklyn for three games and Dave called me to his office at the ballpark, so I hopped a streetcar from the apartment I was renting with Harry Street and went in where Dave was waiting with Red Cassidy and Charlie Draper.

After telling me about the trade, Dave said, “I've been talking with Red and Charlie here about what to do because we're down one outfielder. The three of us like Paul Roth, who's going to be a good ballplayer for us, but Paul's been inconsistent at the plate all spring and you've been hitting the ball hard since before we left Florida. Your fielding needs work but you've gotten better at getting where fly balls are going to land and there's enough left in that pitching arm to make runners think twice about taking an extra base. So, we're moving Case to left to replace Scudder and putting you in right, starting tomorrow. What do you think?”

Well, I didn't really know what to think because I didn't expect to play regularly so soon, but what was I going to say? “Sure, Dave, put me out there and I'll do everything I can to help us win.” He laughed a little and

said, “I thought you'd say that. You're a game kid, Roy. Now we're all going to dress up and Charlie's going to fungo some balls to you in right because that wall is going to give up some weird bounces as long as you play there so you might as well start learning now.”

So there I was. Less than a year after being a rookie pitcher up from Class A, I was now the starting right fielder for the Brooklyn Dodgers with almost no experience in pro ball at that position. And I still wasn't old enough to vote. Like that old song that Grandpa Forrest used to sing when I was a little kid, “Life's a funny proposition after all.”

DID THE TEAM PLAY BETTER AFTER THE TRADE?

Yes, we did. I wasn't the hitter Scudder was, at least not yet, but I was pretty fast and could cover more ground so we didn't have as many Texas Leaguers drop in on us. Swanny could play a little shallower in center and take more chances knowing that Case and I had enough speed to cut off balls that got past him. That helped because we already had a good infield on defense with Red at first, Eddie Davis at second, Harry at short and Jerry Strong at third but the outfield needed an extra step or two.

Harry Street turned out to be a revelation. He'd been up and down the year before and didn't play much before Gabby passed away and the hits didn't come easy for him the rest of the year. That would've ruined a lot of young players but Harry told me Dave pulled him aside in spring training and said, “You're my shortstop. Things are hard right now and you were put in a tough spot last year, but you can play this game. So stuff the pressure and just go out and play.”

Harry put a lot of that pressure on himself and would play tight sometimes, but he relaxed after that talk with Dave and he ended up being as good in the field as Gus had been and a better hitter. Harry was hitting almost .300 at the All-Star Break before tailing off to about .260, but Gabby had been a .230 or .240 hitter so we didn't lose anything there.

And we sure didn't lose anything in the talking department. *Childe Harold*, the papers called him. Both he and Gabby were non-stop talkers out there. The difference was that Gus would get real personal and irritate the other teams and umps while Harry was more like those “Hey, batter batter” kids you see in Little League. That sort of thing. I know we didn't see nearly as many beanballs.

And, boy, did Elmer McCaffrey ever make that a good trade. He won his first six games after coming over from Philly and for a while he and Raz were the best two starters in the league. Roger Stinson turned out to be pretty solid as the third man in the rotation, which we'd hoped.

It was that fourth spot that was kind of soft. Speed Boy Davis did well enough to allow Rats to go to the bullpen but on nights when Speed Boy couldn't find the plate, Dave would have to send Jake Kennedy out or maybe Frenchie DeVoe if Jake had pitched the night before because he was getting older and needed a little more rest.

AS AN OLD CATCHER, DID DAVE HANDLE THE PITCHERS?

He did to a degree. Dave would make the final decisions on who was in the rotation or when it was time to pull someone in a game. He relied a lot on what Fat Stuff Foster had to say. Fat Stuff came up in 1923 on the White Sox with Dave so they'd known each other back when he was just Fred Foster. They trusted each other's judgment so if Dave got on the phone to the bullpen and Fat Stuff told him something, Dave relied on it.

Fat Stuff was still a reliever and was considering becoming an umpire when he retired from playing, but he was still with the team as Spike Russell's pitching coach in my last year with the Dodgers in 1957. He went to Los Angeles when the team moved and stayed with them until 1960, but Fat Stuff was never comfortable living in California and ended up taking a job coaching with Milwaukee, which was close to his home in Racine, and stayed with the Braves until they were moved to Atlanta. Then he said "Enough moving" and retired.

HOW DID THE REST OF THE SEASON GO AFTER THE TRADE?

We were in the second division when Elmer came over in May but got up to second behind the Giants by early August. Then the injuries hit. We were playing New York at home when Dave sent Elmer up to pinch-hit for Raz, who'd got a charley horse on defense in the top of the inning. Elmer singled to right, but then he hurt his back sliding into second to break up the double play after Swanny hit a grounder to third.

The next day, Harry took a liner in the face during batting practice when he wasn't looking and broke his cheekbone, so Alan Whitehouse had to take his place. Whitey was a good player that you could plug in anywhere, but he may have been even quieter than the other three guys in the infield so Harry was really missed.

Then we went to Boston for a long five-game series, with a couple doubleheaders to make up rainouts. It went pretty bad. We lost four of five and Swanny took a spike wound that put him out for a week. I was in a slump, too, so between my bat and Swanny's right shin, Paul Roth saw a lot of action. The team picked up Tony Kapura from Minneapolis for cash to fill in for Harry. He had a better glove there than Whitey did but didn't make a lot of noise because you can't expect a call-up from AA to be a holler guy. Whitey then played a little more in the outfield with Case and Roth if Dave wanted to sit both me and Swanny.

Later, we were playing the Cubs at Wrigley when Fat Stuff got into an argument with the plate umpire, John Hines, on a call and threw his glove way up in the air, which was totally unlike Fat Stuff. Freddie said after the game that Hines told him, “If that glove lands, you're gone.” Gravity won and Fat Stuff was run out. That wasn't a killer but the two-week suspension Fat Stuff got was. He got fined $50, but that wasn't a big deal and we all chipped in to pay it.

By late August, we were in fourth place and I was still slumping. Couldn't buy a hit if I had a coupon. I was pressing and that only made things worse. Dave finally put Paul in right after Swanny came back and had me sit on the bench with him. Our pitchers were exhausted because of Elmer's injury and Fat Stuff's suspension, so Rats went back into the rotation behind Speed Boy and MacManus called up a couple of guys from Montreal, Albert Davison and Churchy Lester. It's kind of funny now because Albert and Churchy were two characters in the old “Pogo” comic strip years later, but we weren't laughing then about how much we needed them to give us some innings.

August became September and we were still in fourth with three games left. The Giants were still in first and Jim Casey asked their manager, Bill Murphy, about who they had to worry about. We came up because we were in fourth place, but Murphy laughed and said, “Brooklyn? Brooklyn??? Is Brooklyn still in the league?” We'd been scuffling along, a win here and a loss there, but that woke us up.

I broke out of my slump, too. I was sitting next to Dave in the dugout during a game in Philly and he said, “You know what? You're thinking way too much. The next time you go up, I want to hear you whistling 'Yankee Doodle' because I'll know you're not overthinking what the pitcher's gonna throw.” Doggoned if it didn't work, too, but I think the catcher and home plate ump both thought I'd fallen out of a tree and landed on my head.

Anyway, we went into Pittsburgh for three games against the Pirates at Forbes when Dave learned what Murphy had said. Well, he called a team meeting and I mean to tell you he read us the riot act. Up to then I'd never heard Dave shout or even cuss, but he sure did a lot of both. None of us had ever seen him that mad but he was steaming.

He didn't pick on any one player because that wasn't his style, but he made sure to let us know that if we didn't start to show a little life out there, a lot of us could expect to play somewhere else in 1941 because MacManus wouldn't think twice about trading any of us for a ball bag and Dave

wouldn't stand in his way because at least ball bags don't loaf on their team. Ha ha, that's not too logical a thing to say looking back at it but we all understood what he meant.

That night we destroyed the Pirates, 17-3, and went on to win all three games at Forbes, then took three in a row in Chicago. We came home and beat St. Louis two out of three and then went to the Polo Grounds and won the first two games against the Giants, who'd cooled off just when we got hot.

Going into the last game of the series, which was also the last game of the year, we were only half a game behind New York in second. Elmer, Swanny and Harry were all back from their injuries and Fat Stuff's suspension had ended a couple weeks before, so everyone was ready to go. The pennant was going to be decided in that third game and there were 60,000 jammed into the stands for it. Do or die time.

IT LOOKS LIKE THAT LAST GAME LIVED UP TO THE BILLING

Boy howdy, it sure did. It was scoreless going into the top of the fourth, when I came up with runners at the corners and singled up the middle to bring in Eddie Davis from third and then Red Allen hit a long single to left that scored Karl Case from second to put us up, 2-0. As much of a character as he was, Razzle Nugent was also a money pitcher and he was throwing beautifully. He took that 2-0 lead into the eighth, before he allowed a cheap homer that just cleared the lower deck in left to lose the shutout. He later gave up a two-run double to Muscles Mulligan, who was a gold-plated jerk on his best days, and we were down, 3-2.

WHAT WAS WRONG WITH MUSCLES MULLIGAN?

He was a big, bulky first baseman who could hit with power. If that was all, no problem, but he played dirty. Muscles would've fit in with those old Baltimore Orioles teams before the turn of the century. When you got a hit and were rounding first or trying to move up from first on a hit or a

steal, he'd give you a hip. Or an elbow. Or tug your belt. Or stick his leg out to trip you up. Every time. And he'd have some smart-alecky comment when he did it. None of us could stand the guy, but he sure paid for it once.

In 1941, Red Allen hit a ball to the left field wall and was going to stretch it for a double when Muscles grabbed his belt long enough to keep him from advancing. Red had a long fuse for a guy whose hair was that color, but Mulligan had been doing stuff like that for years and he'd had it. Red grabbed him by the jersey with his right hand and started belting him, one left after another. The first punch stunned Muscles and he didn't really defend himself after that, so he really took a beating. I don't think even Joe Louis would've had a chance because Red was hot and it took Red Cassidy coaching at first and two more of us to pull him off. I swear to God, I thought he was going to kill him and Muscles needed two guys to help him off the field. But I'll tell you what. He never tried anything like that again, at least not with us.

WOW! SO WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NINTH?

Well, I got a double to left with one out and Jerry Strong came up. Jerry laid this beautiful bunt down the third base line and since I took off with the pitch, the third baseman had to throw to Mulligan at first to get Jerry for the second out. The thing is, Charlie Draper didn't hold me up. He put his hands up like he was, but he nodded towards home and said “Go! Go!” I could hear it but nobody else could because of all the people yelling in the stands, so I hit the bag, cut hard and kept going for the plate.

Well, Muscles was kind of nonchalant on that throw from third because nobody expected me to try for home. He finally figured out what was going on and got a throw off, but I was able to hook slide around the tag and score to tie the game. It was close and Murphy came out to argue, but the run stood and we went into extra innings.

THERE WERE LOTS OF EXTRA INNINGS, WEREN'T THERE?

I'll say there were. I can't remember any game that whole season that went on that long. The fans sure got their money's worth. We traded zeros on the scoreboard in the tenth, the eleventh, the twelfth and the thirteenth innings. It was still 3-3 going into the fourteenth. Babe Stansworth had caught the entire game but then a foul tip split the thumb on his throwing arm in the thirteenth and he had to come out. Blood all over the place and I could see it from out in right field. It was pretty sickening. Everyone in the stands figured Hank West would replace Babe because he'd been the backup all year.

But here's the thing. Very quietly, during the St. Louis series at Ebbets, Dave convinced Mister MacManus to activate him and put Churchy Lester on the reserve list. Hank West was a decent enough hitter, maybe batted about .250 with a couple homers as a reserve, but he wasn't much of a catcher and Dave and Mac agreed that it would be better to have an old-timer ready, just in case. The league office was notified to make it official, but Hank's name was kept on the list of players given to the newspapers and radio guys, even in the scorecards they sold at the ballpark. Babe didn't miss an inning so nobody was wiser.

When Dave came out with his gear on in the thirteenth after Babe was taken off, Bill Murphy came roaring out of the Giants dugout to protest, but Dave gave a copy of his activation notice to Ed Stubblebeard, the home plate umpire. Stubble looked at it, told Murphy everything was in order and that was it. There were umps you could put up a beef with, but Stubblebeard wasn't one of them.

Dave was able to work with Rats Doyle to end the thirteenth so to the top of the fourteenth we went. Swanny flew out to left to lead off but I punched a single between second and first to get on board. Some of that place-hitting in the barn to save Grandma's windows coming back to help later on, I guess. Jerry Strong tried bunting again to move me into scoring position, but this time he popped up to the catcher for the second out.

That brought up Red Allen, who hit a 2-and-2 pitch on the screws and lined it between center and right. I'd taken off on the pitch and there was no question I'd go for third if it was a hit. Well, that ball had enough of a roll to it that it was coming up on the wall in right center, which was a long way from home in the Polo Grounds, so Charlie Draper waved me in from third and this time he wasn't hiding it. I was able to beat the throw home by two steps to put us up, 4-3.

Now it was a matter of holding on to that lead. Elmer McCaffrey came out to replace Rats, who'd thrown two innings already. Elmer had pitched a couple innings in relief to help Speed Boy win the second game of the series the night before so he was a little tired, but Dave played a hunch. This one didn't really work out because after getting the first Giants batter to ground out to Eddie Davis at second, he walked the next batter and then gave up a double to put runners on the corners with one out.

That got Dave out from behind home plate to tap his right arm, which meant he wanted Fat Stuff to come in from the bullpen. Freddie was able to throw off Mulligan's timing with that slop he threw and he got Muscles to foul out to Dave near the screen behind the plate for the second out.

Murphy had been a reserve all year, which was his last as a player, and he sent himself up as a pinch-hitter. I remember the count was 1-and-1 when Fat Stuff threw a curve that Murphy just drilled to right center, and I mean deep right center. I could tell it was going a long way from the sound off his bat so I just lit out after it from near the right field foul line, where I was standing because Murphy was a left-handed hitter. I know I was able to track the ball all the way to the wall, but I don't remember catching it because I slammed the wall in full stride. We didn't have warning tracks then, so I had no idea how much room I had. I was just watching the ball, then it was lights-out.

So we did win the game and the pennant, but I couldn't tell you a thing beyond that because I guess I was out like a light and they carried me

off on a stretcher. I must've held on to the ball because that's what Dave told me later on. But, man what a headache!

5

WORLD SERIES

YOU WERE ABLE TO PLAY IN THE 1940 WORLD SERIES?

Yep. It took from 1916 for Brooklyn to get to the Series and it was only my second year. When you're that young and on a good team, you think you'll play in a lot more of 'em but I played through 1958 and got to just four more World Series after the first one. Can't really complain, though. A lot of guys will play for ten or twenty years and never make it so I wasn't going to miss this one.

YOU PLAYED CLEVELAND. HOW GOOD WERE THEY?

Well, maybe it's because it was my first World Series, but the Indians were the best team I ever played against in one of them. Gee, they had everything. Gene Miller was as fast as any pitcher I hit against and he's the one everybody remembers, but Paul Drewes and Carey Thomas were awfully good too. Gene won 22 for them that year, just like Raz did for us, but Drewes and Thomas combined for 35 more wins so they weren't much of a drop-off. Good hitters like Don Hammerstein, Gene Lanahan, Jerry Gardiner and Bruce Gordon. Good defense, too. A complete team.

YOU FELL BEHIND, 3 GAMES TO 1. HOW'D YOU COME BACK?

We won the first game against Gene Miller, 6-1, so we thought we were in pretty good shape winning and getting him out of the way. Razzle had a great day and Miller kind of fell apart in the fourth inning. He gave up a leadoff walk to Raz, a single to Red Allen and hit me on the arm to load the bases. Ended up giving up a couple more walks to push across two runs and then Jerry Strong hit a two-run double to make it 4-0. That was it for Gene. We knew we wouldn't see him for another couple games after we went to Cleveland and were feeling good about our chances.

BUT THEN YOU DROPPED THE NEXT THREE?

Yeah. Drewes beat us in Game Two at Ebbets, 5-2. Hammerstein broke it open with a three-run homer off Rats Doyle in the top of the seventh to make it 5-0 and that was all she wrote. We got a couple runs in the eighth but it was too late.

Then we went to Cleveland for the next three games. Carey Thomas shut us out in that huge ballpark, 2-0. Hammy hit a two-run double in the first and it held up. We had a chance in the ninth. Eddie Davis was on third and Hank West was on second, but Paul Roth struck out to end the game.

Game Four was just bad. Raz and Miller, just like the first game, but this time it was Razzle who had the bad inning. He gave up three runs in the third and we never were in it after that. I sure didn't help. Muffed a fly ball in the eighth by Andy Painter, a good little catcher but not that much of a hitter. Lanahan scored from second to make it 5-1 and that's how it ended. We were in trouble.

DID SLAMMING THE WALL AFFECT YOU?

I hate excuses, but it really did. I'd been hearing this bong-bong-bong in my head ever since and something like that'll throw you off out in the field and at the plate. Nowadays I'd have probably been set down but in 1940, you played through it. I was only 3-for-16 through the first four games, though, and didn't feel like I had it in the field. I was not helping the team and that was killing me. We were all down. Then Dave called a meeting in his hotel room.

DID DAVE LEONARD CHEW THE PLAYERS OUT?

Gabby Spencer would have, no question, and Dave had every right to because we'd stunk it up after the first game. We'd scored only three runs the next three games and just one over the last two. Eddie Davis was having a great Series but nobody else was hitting. It hurt not having Babe at

catcher because he was pretty consistent and Hank West was never more than a backup, but who knows if Babe wouldn't have slumped too?

Anyway, the players go up to Dave's room at six not knowing what to expect because he wasn't a yeller. We went in and there's this spread of food and drinks waiting on two tables for us. Dave says, “Come on in, boys,” and we had kind of a little party. Then he took us out to a burlesque show at the Century Theatre at Cuyahoga and Grand. Sort of to loosen us up a little, take our minds off our troubles for a night. I think it really helped.

BUT THAT'S WHEN YOU PUNCHED A WRITER, RIGHT?

I did. Not one of my prouder moments. I was in one of the later cars going back to the hotel and when we got to the lobby Jim Casey from the Post-Gazette and Harry Chase were having this loud argument. When I got a little closer, I could hear it was about me. Casey was telling Harry, who was my roomie, that I was yellow because I was afraid of hitting a wall in the outfield.

Well, that ticked me off, to be honest, and then I got into it with Casey a little before I socked him. Twice. He was pretty out of shape before the war and went down like a sack of potatoes. Jerry Strong, who'd been around, saw what I did and told me, “Get up to your room. Now! And don't talk to any reporters. This is gonna be trouble.”

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?

Dave heard about it, of course. He called and told Harry to send me up to see him in his room. I knocked on his door and he told me to come in and sit down. He didn't raise his voice because that wasn't his style, but he was working the toothpick he always had in his mouth, left to right to left, so I could tell he was mad.

Dave asked me what happened and after I told him, he said, “I think everyone on the team has wanted to pop Casey. I sure have. But you can't

go punching reporters, Roy, because we have to have them. Between those guys and Luke Cunningham on radio, that's how people follow this team. Now they're going to read how you punched a writer and who knows how the story's going to be told?"

He told me to apologize to Casey, which I did not want to do because he'd called me yellow. Dave said it didn't matter because you never get the last word when you argue with guys who buy ink by the barrel, so just do it. I promised that I would, but didn't say when.

Then he said he'd noticed me pulling up on that hit by Painter and told me there was no place on his team for players who backed off. That I had the ability to play in the majors for a long time but I had to learn to dig deep when things weren't going well. If I didn't, he'd find someone who would because baseball was as much about courage as it was ability and he had to have players with guts because he had no use for players who didn't. You'd better believe that hit home.

AND THAT'S WHEN THE TEAM TURNED THINGS AROUND?

Not right away. We played Game Five the next day and got off to a bad start. Rats Doyle started against Paul Drewes, who'd beat us in the second game, but he didn't make it out of the second, when McCluskey hit a two-run double to put Cleveland ahead. Dave pulled both Rats and Hank, brought Fat Stuff in from the bullpen and took over at catcher himself. Fat Stuff and Dave had played together back in 1923 and had about thirty years' experience between them, so it was kind of good to see two wise old heads like that out there.

As far as a starting point for a comeback goes, that came when Fat Stuff got plunked by Drewes in his first time up at bat. Both benches emptied because you don't throw at an old relief pitcher who wasn't a headhunter. Some punches were thrown and when the umpires finally got things settled down, both Drewes and Andy Painter for Cleveland were run out while Karl Case and Tom Swanson got tossed, too. That meant Alan

Whitehouse and Paul Roth replacing them in the outfield. More speed but less experience.

That woke everyone up but we were still down 2-0 until the top of the eighth. Red Allen hit a grounder to short that Lanahan kicked away and then I doubled off the reliever to bring Red in to make it a one-run game. Whitehouse hit another double to score me from second and tie the game and then Dennis McCluskey let Whitey's hit get past him in center and Alan kept on running and scored to put us up, 3-2. Fat Stuff held on the rest of the way for the win. Great job by old Fred and Dave both. They really settled things down. I made a nice running catch in the seventh of a foul ball in the right field corner, too, then held on after I hit the wall. I think that might've felt better than hitting the double.

WHITEHOUSE GOT PLENTY OF CLUTCH HITS, DIDN'T HE?

He was never a starter in all the years he played for us and never got the headlines, but Whitey was one of our most valuable players. He could play all three outfield positions, three more infield positions and was a great pinch-hitter and pinch-runner, which made him worth his weight in gold for that alone. Didn't have any power at all and I doubt that he hit twenty homers in all the years Whitey played in Brooklyn, but he had a lot of speed so he could pinch-run and just had a knack for getting a hit when we needed one.

DIDN'T HE RETIRE FROM BASEBALL KIND OF EARLY?

I think Alan was about 34 when he quit. He could still run and probably could've played three more years. We were at spring training in Vero Beach in 1950 when he decided he'd had enough, told Spike Russell he was going home to San Francisco to be a stock broker full-time and then he did just that. Never played again, even old-timers games.

You see, Whitey was from a little town called Rockaway Beach on the Oregon coast when Jack MacManus signed him out of high school, but

went to college in the offseason, eventually earned his degree at San Francisco State College and stayed. He was always one of the quietest guys on the team and we never saw him out with a woman in all those years. Turns out he was gay. Alan told me during the 1948 season and swore me to secrecy because that would've ended his career. Guess he'd figured out that I wasn't a gossip and wouldn't tell anyone. And I didn't.

You know that talk in a clubhouse can get pretty crude and while he never said anything, it bugged Whitey whenever it turned to gays, which was not the word used back then. He never said a word, of course, and I couldn't say anything because it could've led to Alan being found out. Once he established himself as a broker in San Francisco, he was making enough money that he didn't need baseball so he walked away. Most players couldn't do that but he was preparing for the day when he finally got tired of playing and wanted to spend all his time in a place where being gay wasn't that big a deal.

We stayed in touch over the years, talked by phone every few months. I couldn't relate to it but it didn't matter to me that he preferred men. It was his life, just like staying here on the farm even when I could've lived larger in a city was my choice. He died of AIDS a couple years ago but at least he'd been able to live his life on his own terms after getting out of baseball, and I respected that a lot. A decent, gentle guy who never hurt anyone. I miss Alan Whitehouse.

SO IT WAS BACK TO BROOKLYN FOR GAME SIX?

Yeah. Yeah. It was Elmer McCaffrey against Carey Thomas. Elmer was a big old farm boy, you know, and he'd pitched well when Thomas shut us out in Cleveland. We used to call him The Late Elmer McCaffrey because he was always late getting to the clubhouse before a game and always, always the last player on the field every inning when he was pitching.

Anyway, Elmer had his best stuff that afternoon but, geez, it seems like he was pitching out of a jam every inning. Thomas was as good as the

first time we saw him. The Indians scored the first run of the game in the top of the fourth and then went up 2-0 in the seventh when Hammerstein tripled past Swanny in center and came in when Bruce Gordon hit a grounder to Harry at short that hit a pebble and hopped into left field. Then Andy Painter hit a hard grounder up the middle but Eddie Davis made a great play to stop it and started a 4-6-3 double play to end the inning. Eddie was another guy who never said twenty words all year but, boy, did he ever have a great Series.

Eddie led off the bottom of the seventh and got a walk, then Dave came up and sent a hit-and-run grounder into the hole between first and second. Eddie was running on the pitch and moved to third. That brought up Elmer, who was a very good hitting pitcher. Dave surprised everyone at Ebbets by stealing second. Painter didn't even throw to second and to this day I don't know whether it was to prevent Eddie from scoring from third or from the shock of seeing a 39-year-old catcher stealing a base.

I think that got into the heads of the Cleveland players because after Elmer hit a sac fly to center that scored Eddie to tie the game, we ended up getting seven runs that inning and it was a matter of getting the last six outs from then. I got the last out in the ninth when Hammerstein hit a long fly to right and we won 7-3 to tie the Series at three wins each. Pretty exciting.

IT'S SURPRISING THERE WAS A BANQUET AFTER THE GAME.

It wasn't really a surprise to us because it had been scheduled a few weeks before the season ended and we hadn't expected to get as far as we did, but having it the night before Game Seven was tough. The Chamber of Commerce got together with Martin Motors to schedule it at the Hotel Nevada and at that time, nobody thought we'd still be playing.

All the players were invited but only Dave, Fat Stuff, Jerry Strong and me showed up for it, which got Jack MacManus steamed up. Well, it was a nice thing, Dave got a new Lincoln out of it while Fat Stuff, Jerry and I were

all given V8 Roadsters. That was a sweet car and I drove mine for at least ten years. Usually I drove a tractor or an old truck, ha ha.

Anyway, all these people from the Chamber and Martin Motors took turns speaking and when MacManus started talking, three painters came into the ballroom wearing overalls bringing paint cans and a ladder with them and they set up behind Mac during his speech. Mac's talking as one of the painters climbs the ladder, which starts shaking on him and eventually a bunch of white paint was dumped on MacManus and his nice suit.

If you know anything about Jack MacManus, you know he had that Irish temper and even though he was covered in white paint, you saw him getting red and was about to explode like only Mac could. Then the painter on top of the ladder takes off the cap he was wearing. It was Razzle Nugent, who'd come in with Harry Street and Karl Case. Raz looks down at Mac and says, “How are ya, boss?” Broke the whole room up and even Mister MacManus had to laugh. Sort of. Raz, Harry and Case all ended up getting cars, too.

THAT HAD TO LOOSEN RAZ NUGENT UP FOR GAME SEVEN

Oh, it never took much to loosen up ol' Raz. He was a party waiting to happen back then. But, yeah, he was in a good mood with his new car and all the next day when he and Gene Miller squared up for a third time. And what a wild game it was!

We took a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the fourth when Harry Street blooped a two-out single to shallow right that scored Red Allen from second, but then Cleveland scored three in the seventh to go ahead. It didn't help that McCluskey singled to me in right and I screwed up by throwing to Eddie at second instead of Dave at home because Miller scored from third on the play. Stupid of me.

We got a run back in the eighth when Dave doubled and sent Babe Stansworth up to hit for Raz. Babe had been activated just before the game

and even though his right thumb was bandaged up, he was still hurting and not in any shape to play catcher. He was still a dangerous man with a bat so Miller walked him intentionally to get to Red Allen, who was hitting leadoff. One of Miller's pitches got behind Andy Painter so both Dave and Paul Roth, who was pinch-running for Babe, moved up. Red then hit a sac fly to left that scored Dave from third to cut the Indians' lead to 3-2.

Roger Stinson, who'd only mopped up in Game Four, came on for Raz and had a 1-2-3 top of the ninth. I led off the bottom of the ninth with a double and went to third on a bad throw from McCluskey in left. Swanny then bunted down the third base line, but it went foul. I saw that Gene Lanahan had dug a little trench with his spikes and appealed to Ed Stubblebeard, who was umping home plate. Stubble came out and ruled it a hit so we had runners at the corners with no out. Karl Case then hit a fly to center field and I beat the throw home to tie the score.

After Stinson went three-up, three-down against Cleveland in the top of the tenth, it was our turn. Miller got the first two outs but Red singled off Lanahan's glove at third and I was able to draw a walk. At that point, Tom Swanson came up and hit a three-run homer into the upper deck in left field to give us a 6-3 win and the World Series title. One of the most exciting games I've ever been in.

DID BEDLAM SET IN AT EBBETS FIELD?

Oh, that's putting it lightly. You had fans jumping over the railing, dancing in the aisles, everything you'd expect in a Game Seven win at home. And it was so loud! Brooklyn fans were noisy anyway but this was something else. Remember, the Dodgers hadn't even been to the World Series in over twenty years and this was their first win. People were going crazy. You couldn't even hear Hilda Chester clanging on her frying pan.

DID TOM SWANSON GET A RAISE IN 1941?

I'm pretty sure we all did, but Tom was the man of the hour for Game Seven. Jack MacManus could be a generous guy when the mood struck. The thing about the World Series back then is that it was a huge financial deal to win it. Bear in mind that few of us were making over $10,000 a season. Raz was for sure, and Karl Case was making exactly that much. I'm pretty sure Swanny might've been and maybe Red Allen or Elmer McCaffrey, too. Eddie Davis was named MVP of the Series, so you know he got a raise.

I ended up getting $3,000 that season and the winner's share for the World Series was $6,400 per player, a lot of money in 1940. Even the loser's share of $4,400 was pretty good too but that $6,400 sure was a difference-maker for me and Grandma. Paid for a new barn roof and a tractor back on the farm and we were able to put some of it in the bank, too.

BY THE WAY, DID YOU EVER APOLOGIZE TO JIM CASEY?

Yes, I did. After the last game in Cleveland. Not that he never gave me a hard time after that, but we sort of had an understanding the rest of my time in Brooklyn and he wrote a nice column when I went to Boston in 1958 after the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles. And he moved with them.

One of the papers out there wanted their baseball writer to know the team enough to get good interviews with them. Well, obviously there wasn't anyone in LA who fit that description going into the first season, so the paper gave Casey a raise from what he'd been paid in New York, paid his way there and put him up in an apartment during the season.

I don't know if Jim was thinking about what he'd do after the season because the apartment was only paid for through October when the season ended, but he was a good writer so the paper kept him on to write about the Rams during the fall and college basketball during the winter. It worked out for everyone for a while but after a couple years, Casey got homesick and moved back to New York and wrote for one of the papers there until he retired about 1970.

DID YOU ATTEND MANY BANQUETS AFTER THE SERIES?

Ha ha, not at all. I came home to Tomkinsville and hit the tractor to turn up soil for the next year's crops. We were able to replace the old tractor with my World Series share and fix the barn up a bit, which had been needed for a few years. My off-seasons were pretty much the same year after year because when you've got a working farm, there's always something that has to be done.

DO YOU GROW THE SAME CROPS THAT YOU DID THEN?

Pretty much. This year, it's four acres of corn, four acres of green beans, four acres of potatoes, four acres of tomatoes and four acres are taking a rest. Next year, we'll use the fallow field for growing and give this year's corn field some time off. Each field gets a year off every five years and we rotate the crops from field to field so the soil isn't overused.

The difference is that we grow one more crop because we took away one acre from each field to create a fifth field. The harvests for each crop are smaller, obviously, but the four smaller crops bring in a little more money than when we had three larger crops. Grandma and I used to do all the planning for the next year after I came home from Brooklyn in October but it's been just me doing it since she passed away. Things have never been the same without Grandma but those crops just insist on growing.

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KEYSTONE KIDS

DID WINNING THE 1940 SERIES CHANGE THINGS?

Boy, did it ever, but not for the right reasons. We had every right to be a more confident team after winning the World Series, but I think we were too confident. We had most of the 1940 team back but we didn't have our manager.

Dave expected a good salary after coming in during the season and bringing a title home, but Mister MacManus wouldn't give him close to what he asked because he wanted Dave to manage a full season first. They went round and round and, Mac being Mac, things apparently got pretty heated because Dave quit and took a job managing the St. Louis Browns. You know things were bad when Dave walked away from a championship team to run the worst team in baseball. MacManus blew that one.

Of course, Dave had the last laugh when he took the Browns to their only pennant three years later. He didn't get a raise after that season either so he went back to Philadelphia, focused on his insurance business and never managed a baseball team again.

WHO REPLACED DAVE LEONARD AS MANAGER?

After Dave quit, Mister MacManus traded Jerry Strong to the White Sox for Ginger Crane to play shortstop and manage the Dodgers, sort of like Gus Spencer. I guess Mac liked managers who could play shortstop, as we'd learn again later. When Ginger came in and with Jerry traded away, that meant Harry Street moved from short to third.

CHARLIE DRAPER AND RED CASSIDY WERE PASSED OVER?

Yeah, which surprised me. Both of them had been with the team for a few years and they both stayed for several more years. In fact, Red was still with the Dodgers when they moved to LA in 1958 so Mister MacManus obviously valued him. It was strange that a guy who'd risen from an enlisted man to an officer in World War I didn't promote one of his team's loyal lieutenants, but it was Mac's team to do what he wanted and Ginger had done some managing in Chicago so Mac must've figured he could handle both jobs in Brooklyn.

HOW DID THE SEASON GO FOR THE DODGERS IN 1941?

It was nothing like it went in 1940, I'll tell you that. It was kind of strange because Ginger Crane was a real pepperpot, like Gabby Gus had been, but the rest of the players besides Harry and Swanny were quiet guys and it sort of seemed like we were just going through the motions at times, like being the defending champions was good enough. Just showing up is never good enough.

Ginger would yell at us to liven up plenty of times, but he couldn't get us to kick it into gear. That's what I mean by it being strange. You could count the number of times Dave raised his voice on one hand, but he got an effort because he was so respected by the players. I don't think Ginger ever got the same respect. I don't know if it was because he was an American League guy or because it was obvious who his favorites were, like Karl Case and Tom Swanson, but it just wasn't a good match.

We didn't have a horrible season. I think we went 80-74 and finished third behind Pittsburgh and St. Louis, but you can't put lightning in a bottle and that lightning in 1940 was gone in 1941. What happened to Eddie Davis is sort of what I'm talking about.

Eddie had been a good second baseman in Brooklyn for many years but in 1941, he seemed to have lost his range and grounders he would've

gobbled up a year earlier were rolling to me in right field instead. One night in July, we were coming back to the hotel in Chicago after playing the Cubs at Wrigley and Eddie's bat got caught in an elevator door. He ended up breaking his arm and was done for the season. It was that kind of year.

I have to say that Eddie's broken arm did lead to maybe the one positive thing that happened in 1941 and that was Bobby and Spike Russell being called up from Nashville. Bobby took over for Eddie at second immediately and did pretty well the rest of the season. With him, Ginger and Harry out there most of our infielders were pretty noisy. Red Allen at first was never a holler guy but he didn't have to be. Spike actually sat for a few weeks until Ginger decided that the team was better when Spike was at shortstop so we had both Russells on the field by the end of August.

Sitting down had to be hard for Ginger to do because no player ever wants to admit their best days are behind him but he was pushing 40 and might have had less range than Eddie did. He was only batting about .230 with no power and, frankly, he knew that Mister MacManus would have no problem firing him if the team didn't start playing better. And with Spike and Bobby on both sides of second we did play better, especially on defense.

WHAT KIND OF TEAMMATES WERE THE RUSSELLS?

Even though they were brothers and had played alongside each other in the minors for years, they were very different people. They were orphans, you know? Grew up together at a boarding house in Charlotte and played together every stop on the way up the ladder: Greenwood in the Cotton States League, Savannah, Dallas, Little Rock, Scranton and Nashville. Ted Fuller was a Dodgers scout who signed both of them and recommended to Mac that they both be brought up when Eddie got hurt so Tommy O'Toole, a rookie pitcher, was sent down.

Anyway, Spike was a great teammate from the beginning. Even though he was just a rookie, he had an air about him that you see on guys who were much older. A quiet confidence that gave the sense that he knew

what he was doing and why he was doing it. You could tell after a couple of weeks that he'd be a manager someday. I had no idea how soon he'd get that chance, but he was a born leader.

Bobby was different. He was a talker and sometimes shot his mouth off when he should've just kept it shut. Good player, no question about that. A nice hitter and he was very good defensively. Bobby had a habit of agitating opponents, umpires and even teammates, though, and Spike had to haul him out of trouble more than once because he was a couple years older and Bobby would listen to him. Bobby and I were teammates for years, but we were never close. He wasn't a bad guy but he could be hard to be around sometimes.

TELL ME HOW THE RUSSELLS ALMOST DIDN'T PLAY IN 1942.

Ha ha, you heard about that? Well, they'd played for $3,500 each in 1941 but played so well after they were called up in July, they felt they deserved a raise. Mister McManus agreed and offered them $4,500 each. Spike did the negotiating for the brothers and he wanted $7,500 each. Mac brought his offer up to $11,000, or $5,500 per Russell. Spike stood firm and Mac got so mad he pulled his offer off the table.

Mac eventually went down to Nashville, where the Russells were spending the off-season and had found jobs, and met Spike's demand of $15,000 for the two brothers so the holdout was over before spring training.

DID THE 1942 SEASON GO ANY BETTER FOR THE DODGERS?

Not at first, it didn't. The new season meant the same factions on the team that had started forming in 1941, and that's never a good thing. Tom Swanson and Karl Case were sort of a faction all by themselves. Swanny just seemed bored with playing baseball in general and that really showed up on defense. He'd swing a bat hard but that was about the only thing he was putting any effort into. Case was Case. He'd usually play hard but he played

for himself. Hit behind a runner? Lay down a bunt? Take on a good pitch during a steal attempt? Karl wouldn't do any of that.

Since Swanny and Case were Ginger Crane's pets, nothing ever happened and that's no good for morale. Ginger and Case eventually had a falling out over a woman in Cincinnati so they were barely speaking to each other but as long as Karl was one of the team's best hitters, Ginger kept playing him because he needed to win to keep his job.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about. We're playing an exhibition game against the Giants in Miami and Raz Nugent is pitching. He'd had a good year in 1941 and won 20 games and while Raz was a party boy off the field, he was usually all business on the mound, even in exhibition games. Anyway, the Giants had two runners on when a batter hit a ball to Case in left.

Karl was playing too far back to catch it because he wanted to stand in the shade instead of being in a position to catch the ball and end the inning, so he had to run in on it to cut it off and it ended up taking a high bouce and getting past him. Both runners scored and you could see steam rising from Raz on the mound. After the game in the locker room, Raz had something to say to Case, who said something back and the two started brawling right there. It was only an exhibition game but you could tell we were in for another long season.

THAT WAS THE YEAR MACMANUS HIRED A TEAM SHRINK?

Yeah, it was. Doctor Traum. We were in fourth place in June when MacManus brought the guy in and called him a team physician, but I never saw anything like a stethoscope or even a tongue depressor. The guy was from Austria and was supposed to know how to fire us up, I guess, but all he did was tick everyone off.

He even ordered us to have a team breakfast at 9:30 in the morning in Pittsburgh after we'd lost in 12 innings the night before and didn't even

get back to the Schenley Hotel until after midnight. Doctor Traum lasted about two weeks and got fired after we dropped from fourth to fifth.

That series got off to a bad start because Bobby missed the train from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh for some reason so Whitehouse had to play the first game at second. Ginger fined him and refused to pay him back for the ticket he bought to ride a later train, so nobody was in a good mood even before this shrink called for a 9:30 breakfast. Mister MacManus had some good ideas but this wasn't one of them.

WAS THIS ABOUT WHEN JOCKO KLEIN JOINED THE TEAM?

Just before. Mac bought his contract from Rochester in late June after Hank West got drafted and it turned out to be good timing. A couple weeks after that, we were playing the Cubs at Ebbets when Babe Stansworth broke an ankle blocking a runner at the plate. This was in the third or fourth inning so Jocko had to go in after only pinch-hitting maybe three times after coming down from Rochester.

Well, in the top of the ninth there was another play at the plate and another Cubs base runner just plowed into Jocko to score as the ball arrived on a relay from Harry Street at third. Jocko held on to the ball and the runner missed the plate but the home plate umpire, a guy we called Lantern Jaw, called him safe and the Cubs went ahead. Ginger came streaming out of the dugout to read Lantern Jaw the riot act and got tossed. We lost the game and that was the last time Ginger Crane was in a Brooklyn uniform.

SO MACMANUS FIRED HIM AFTER THE GAME?

Shucks, he may have fired Ginger before the game was over. I heard that Mac was waiting for Ginger in the locker room when he got tossed. By the time we came in, they were both gone. Nobody knew what had happened until the next morning. We could all see something like that coming because we'd dropped down to sixth place by then and Mac was the kind of owner who would do something to keep things from getting worse.

Even if it wasn't the right thing, like trading Jerry for Ginger, making Ginger the manager and bringing in some shrink for a baseball team.

Before our last road trip, Ginger had dropped our meal money from $6 a day to $4, as though eating less would make us start winning. We were in Cincinnati when he did that without consulting Mister McManus, who only found out after we got back to Brooklyn. I think that may have been the final straw because Mac wanted to know everything that went on with his team, especially when it came to money.

As hard to deal with as he could be sometimes, he did try to treat his players better than other owners. That's why players on other teams hoped they'd be traded to the Dodgers if they got traded at all. They knew Mac would take care of them if they hustled for him.

DID CHARLIE OR RED MANAGE THE TEAM TEMPORARILY?

Not this time. We had a doubleheader against the Cubs the day after Ginger got fired, so everyone showed up early and there waiting for us was Spike Russell, who Mac had made the manager the night before. We were pretty surprised because here was a guy who was 25 years old and had still been in the minors one year earlier, but he was going to manage a major league team? When Spike called a meeting in the locker room, we all kind of looked at each other. What now?

Spike started off by saying that we all knew what the problem was, but he didn't want to hear any more about it. It was over. Then he said he wanted to see us hustle and take chances. We'd been playing kind of tight because we didn't want Ginger calling us out if we screwed up, but Spike wasn't a shouter who'd show up a player in front of his teammates.

He said that it hadn't been that long since the Dodgers beat Cleveland in the World Series and that most of those players were still on the team. That we could still be a good team but people needed to believe in themselves, trust each other and play hard for each other. He was looking

right at Case when he said that and Karl kind of looked away, but everyone knew what he meant.

Then he said there'd be some changes. No more morning practices. No more shrinks or 9:30 breakfasts after a night game. Meal money was going back up to $6 a day. And that there'd be no more juggling of the lineup, batting order or pitching rotation. We all had a job to do, everyone was going to know what their job was and that they were expected to get that job done. And pitchers would take regular turns throwing batting practice, including starters on an off day for them. Starting with Razzle.

LAYING DOWN THE LAW. HOW DID RAZ REACT?

Exactly as you'd expect Raz to react. He was a great pitcher but also a bit of a prima donna who liked to go by his own rules. Raz told Spike, "I don't throw batting practice." Sort of challenged him. Spike walked over to him, looked Raz right in the eyes and said, "You WILL take your turn. Starting TODAY." No shouting but very firmly. We could tell he meant what he said and that it wasn't Raz' choice. And Raz said, "Okay." And sure enough, Raz was throwing BP before the game.

WHAT SORT OF EFFECT DID SPIKE TAKING OVER HAVE?

Like going from night to day. We won both games against the Cubs that day and even pulled a triple play in the second game. The team was energized in a way that Ginger Crane could never get us in two seasons. I think part of it was that as much as Ginger talked tough, he'd back down if a player challenged him. I played for Spike Russell the rest of my career in Brooklyn and I never saw him back down to any player who back-talked him. He was sort of like a smaller version of Red Allen, a quiet guy who didn't go out of his way to get attention but very tough.

Swanny had shoved Spike during spring training when he was still a minor leaguer once, saying something like "You stupid rookie." It took three of us to pull Spike off him before he put Swanny in the hospital. I

mean, it was a real beating and Swanny ran about 6'2" and 200 pounds. Spike had such fast fists, you know. He could land two or three punches in the same time most guys might land one. Nobody was ever dumb enough to pick a fight with Spike after that.

BUT SPIKE HAD A SITUATION WITH JOCKO KLEIN?

That he did, and it had nothing to do with baseball. After Jocko took over catching after Babe Stansworth broke his ankle, we all kind of held our breath because he was just a rookie while Babe had been with the team so long and one of the guys. He was sort of part of that faction with Swanny and Case, three older guys who had their own way of doing things.

Anyway, Jocko showed within a couple weeks that he could not only fill in for Babe, he was actually an upgrade. Very good hitter with liners to all fields, hard to strike out and totally unafraid on defense with a better throwing arm than Stansworth ever had. In a way, Jocko taking over was sort of a changing of the guard because Babe never got back into the starting lineup after he came back and eventually was traded to the Reds.

Well, that didn't set well with Case or Swanny, who were Babe's best friends on the team, and Bobby Russell joined in with them for whatever reason. The fact that Jocko was Jewish had a lot to do with it, too, which was just stupid. Who cares what a player is or where he comes from as long as he's a good teammate who does his job, which is exactly what Spike was talking about at that first meeting?

It didn't help matters when Jocko joined a card game on the train after a doubleheader in Cincy and cleaned house. I think he came away with about $60 of Case's money, which was a lot of money in 1942.

SO CASE REALLY HAD IT IN FOR KLEIN AFTER THAT?

To say the least. Things went downhill for Jocko after that, even though he was playing well and he and Case nearly got into a fight during

BP in Pittsburgh after that. On top of Jocko taking Babe's job, because we could all see he was a better catcher, and being Jewish, he'd won a lot of Karl's money in front of some teammates on the train. We were playing better but the factions were still around.

The thing is, Jocko was a really good guy, and smart. He liked to read poetry, he was finishing his Business degree in college back in Kansas City and he was kind of an intellectual, although he didn't lord it over anyone. You could just tell.

Anyway, things came to a head in the batting cage in Pittsburgh and Spike decided to call a team meeting in the locker room after sending Jocko out for some phone call that I think Spike had arranged ahead of time. Then Spike kind of lit into us. Said that as long as he was managing the Dodgers, he didn't care if a player was a Protestant, a Catholic, a Jew or a Hindu as long as they played hard, played smart and helped the team win.

Then he said that Jocko had been doing a great job at a tough position for a guy who'd only been called up in June and that Jocko was going to be our catcher until someone better came along. Playing baseball was what we all did as a profession and it was stupid to hold this thing or that against a teammate if he was helping us make more money.

Well, most of the guys could see where Spike was coming from and bought into it, even Swanny to a degree, but Case, Bobby and Rats Doyle didn't. In fact, Case tried starting something with Jocko again during BP in Brooklyn but this time Jocko decided he'd had enough and didn't back down until Case finally shut up.

WHAT HAPPENED TO GET PEOPLE OFF JOCKO'S BACK?

It finally took some bonehead fans behind the dugout at Shibe Park in Philly near the end of the season. These three idiots were giving Jocko a hard time the entire game and they were loud enough that I could hear them out in center field, where I played after switching places with Swanny,

who'd lost a step or two. Anyway, the more beer these guys drank, the worse they got, calling Jocko a stinking Jew boy, dirty kike and even worse.

Finally, about the eighth inning, we'd had enough and a bunch of us went up into the stands with bats to shut them up. Harry Street was the first to go but Raz was right behind him, Swanny went up, Bobby went up and I even grabbed a Louisville Slugger and went up. Case stayed in the dugout but we didn't really need him. By the time the ushers showed up, we'd shut those jerks up and they were kicked out of the ballpark. Case never really came around but while Jocko heard garbage from the stands for years, he never had a problem on the team after that.

WAS THAT A GALVANIZING MOMENT FOR THE TEAM?

It kind of was. We only got as high as fourth in the standings at the end of the season but we played a lot more together after that and even took two out of three in St. Louis to end the season and the Cards were going to the World Series, so we had a sense that things were finally on track for the Dodgers. And Case was traded after the season because Mister MacManus learned what he'd been doing.

WERE YOU LOSING PLAYERS TO THE ARMY BY THEN?

Not many in 1942. A few players in both leagues enlisted right away but for the most part, there weren't a lot of guys missing on the field that year. We started seeing more guys drafted in 1943 and even more in 1944 and 1945. I had a draft deferment because I was pretty much running the farm here since Grandma was getting older, but I played one more season in Brooklyn before enlisting by the end of 1943.

7

ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

LET'S TALK ABOUT 1943, WHEN YOU WON THE PENNANT

Well, we did win the pennant and played the Yankees in the World Series and I won my first batting title. In some ways, that pennant came harder for us than the one in 1940 did, though.

WHY WAS THAT?

We started off slowly and it seemed like there were obstacles every step of the way. Things looked okay in spring training. We had most of the players we'd finished with in 1942 and after Mister MacManus traded Karl Case to the Braves for $8,500, he used most of that money to buy Clyde Baldwin's contract from Dallas in the Texas League to replace Case in left.

Clyde was a big kid out of Tennessee, not as good a fielder as Case could be when he wanted to or as good a hitter for average, but Clyde had a lot more power and was fast enough to outrun his mistakes when he had trouble judging a fly ball. He was a bit green but you could see the raw talent and we figured that he could develop into the Dodgers cleanup hitter for a decade if he kept his nose clean. And that was the problem.

BALDWIN WAS A TROUBLEMAKER?

Not like Case had been, causing problems on the field or locker room. But he was a drinker who liked his good times and that created problems. He and a pitcher named Bones Hathaway were roommates and both of them enjoyed the night life, which didn't help things go better the next day. Bonesy had been called up for a couple weeks in 1942 and he looked like

he'd be a good one, but he was more of a thrower than a pitcher and not ready to face big league batters so he got sent back down to Montreal.

Anyway, early in the 1943 season Clyde and Bonesy were spotted at the Coronado in St. Louis by Jim Casey and Bill Hanson, who was our traveling secretary. Clyde and Bonesy were drinking the night before a day game at Sportsman's Park, which could be hotter than the furnaces of Hades during the afternoon.

They were with this girl band singer who was from Clyde's hometown in Tennessee, Jane Andrews, and the more they drank, the bigger a scene they were making. Then they went upstairs six sheets to the wind and ran into Spike Russell and Charlie Draper. The next day, Spike called a players-only meeting and made it clear: No drinking before a day game. And this was only May.

YOU'VE MENTIONED BALDWIN. HOW ABOUT HATHAWAY?

Funny you should ask because Bonesy was the one scheduled to pitch after he and Baldwin went out and caused that meeting. And he did great even though you knew he was working with the mother of all hangovers and it had to be 100 degrees out there. And humid! St. Louis was the worst place in the league to play because the summers there are so miserable. That game with the Cardinals went 17 innings and Bonesy went all of them. By the way, Bonesy's real name was J.B. Hathaway, but I never knew what the J.B. initials were for. Maybe that's all it was.

Anyway, it was 1-1 going into the bottom of the 17th, when he gave up a walk, a popup to Jocko at catcher for one out and a double up the middle that I was able to get the relay home fast enough to keep the lead runner from scoring. The next batter topped a bunt back to the mound that Bones fielded okay but he lost his footing throwing to Jocko at the plate. The throw went wide, the runner at third scored and that was the game and the Cardinals ended up sweeping us to drop us seven games out of first.

I've always wondered whether Spike kept Bones out there so long to teach him a lesson or because he was pitching so well, but Spike didn't say anything after the game. What could he say, really?

As a pitcher, Bones could be very tough. His fastball was okay, good movement but not overpowering. He had a decent change that could've been a little better with work but it was his curveball that got batters out. I had a pretty good curve when I pitched and it would get a good late break but Bones' would drop off the table like a sinker, only with a break. He didn't always have the greatest control but when it was working for him, he'd have right-handed batters cringing because his curve would start out like it would plunk them, then take this big dip to the outside and bust over the outside corner.

He'd take it easy on us in batting practice but every so often, Bones would break off that curve and oh my! I'm so glad I never had to hit against him for real.

DID THE SEASON IMPROVE AFTER THAT MEETING?

Not really, at least not right away. Coming into August, we were ten games behind St. Louis but then we finally started putting it together and getting some wins. Until then, we'd get a win here and a win there, but never a streak of more than two games. In August, we had streaks of five and six wins and were able to get to within five games going into September. We kept chipping away and I think the heat in St. Louis was affecting the Cardinals because they lost games they'd have put away in April and May so by mid-September, we were only two games out of first.

I should say that Bones Hathaway's season did improve after Spike had that meeting, starting with his 17-inning game even though that ended with a loss. He just pitched magnificently for us and was our best pitcher from June on, even more than Raz Nugent or Elmer McCaffrey, who was having a great year himself that season. Bonesy got his tenth shutout of 1943 in Cincinnati and Clyde had a big game with a homer and a triple at

Crosley Field, a place he always seemed to hit at well even though he was a lefty batter and Crosley was more friendly to right-handed hitters with that short left field wall and the laundry sign to aim at.

Later that night, the players all got phone calls in their rooms at the Rhinelander Hotel about a team meeting in Spike's room at 7:30 the next morning. Well, we showed up the next morning and found out that Spike had never called a meeting, so we'd all been had. All but Bones and Clyde, apparently, since they were the only two players who weren't there. After that, Spike split them up as roommates and put them in with married guys, Bones with Fat Stuff Foster and Clyde with Harry Street, who'd gotten married in the off-season.

DID THAT NON-MEETING AFFECT THE SEASON?

Not much, really. We still kept pace with St. Louis and we finally tied them for first going into our final series of the season, which happened to be three games against the Cardinals at Ebbets Field. No pressure at all.

Things did get interesting the night before the first game, though. Clyde decided he had to go to the Kit-Kat Club in Queens, where that girl from Tennessee was singing with the house band there. Bones and Clyde were roomies at home and Bonesy got wind that Clyde had gone to the Kit-Kat, so he took off to bring him back because we had the most important series of the season coming up.

Well, he did just that but Bill Hanson somehow found out that Bones had gone to the Kit-Kat Club without hearing the back story and tipped off Spike, who then cut Bones the next morning. Even after the Rookie of the Year season he'd had for us, Spike sent him home.

DIDN'T BONES TELL SPIKE WHY HE WENT TO THE CLUB?

No, he didn't. He didn't want to tattle on Clyde, who was still his best friend on the team even though they weren't rooming together anymore.

The thing is, neither Bones nor Clyde were drinking that night and they both did get back to their apartment by 9:00PM. If he'd told Spike exactly what happened, he might've avoided everything but Hanson had filled Spike's head up with the story that Bones was going out drinking. The truth didn't come out until later.

YOU WENT INTO THE SERIES MINUS YOUR BEST PITCHER?

Yeah, that was a bit of a disadvantage, to say the least. It really threw us off when we learned in the locker room that Friday afternoon that Bones was on his way back to Berea, Kentucky, which was his hometown. Raz started the first game but had to fight his way through one jam after another and it ended up being a high-scoring game. The Cards were up, 8-7, going into the bottom of the ninth when the home plate umpire, Ed Stubblebeard, made a call that cost us a chance to at least tie the game.

We had Bobby Russell on third and Jocko Klein on first with two outs when Spike singled Bobby home to tie the game, except Stubblebeard ruled Spike out because he'd batted out of order. You see, Raz was in the on-deck circle when Clyde Baldwin, who was in the game because Bones wouldn't rat on him, was batting with one out. There was a conference on the mound with the St. Louis pitcher, catcher and manager and Raz, being Raz, went out to the mound to join in as a joke.

Instead of going back to the on-deck circle after Stubblebeard chased him from the mound, though, Raz went to the dugout. Spike, who was our leadoff hitter, lost track and went up to the plate after Clyde popped out to short for the second out. When Spike was called out for batting out of order, that was the game. Stubble apologized to Spike afterwards because he'd blown a couple of calls during the game that cost us, but what could Spike say? I'll give Stubblebeard credit for being honest.

SO YOU WERE ONE GAME BACK WITH TWO GAMES TO GO?

Yeah, we were in a real pickle. One more thing happened that night that I think really turned some things around for us. Bobby Russell was able to find out what Bill Hanson had been up to and had a long talk with Mister MacManus about it. That's when Mac learned that it was Hanson who'd set up that 7:30 meeting in Spike's room, not Clyde and Bones, and that Bones and Clyde did not stay at the Kit-Kat Club drinking as Bill said, but got home by 9 without a drop of alcohol between the two of them.

WHY WOULD BILL HANSON DO THINGS LIKE THAT?

I don't know. I've wondered about it for years and can't come up with one good reason why Bill would do that. I do know that he would be around Spike and the coaches when they talked strategy and he'd throw his own opinions in there, which isn't what a business manager is supposed to do. Maybe he wanted to feel important or more like an insider than he really was, but why in the world did he think setting up our best pitcher that year and one of our best power hitters would do him any good?

It goes without saying that after Bobby filled him in, Mister MacManus absolutely hit the ceiling and he fired Bill Hanson that night. That's one time when Bobby's mouth did some good and he said in the locker room that he'd never seen Mac that mad, even when Spike turned down his second contract offer to the Russell brothers. I can only imagine. Hanson never worked again in baseball so I'm guessing Mac got the word out what kind of guy the other teams would have on their hands if they hired him.

SO THE CALL WENT OUT FOR BONES TO COME BACK?

Of course, but it wasn't that easy because he was on a train to Kentucky and had to get off at one of the stops and catch another train heading north to New York. You need good timing to do that in short order and it was getting later into the evening when Mac himself got on the phone to try tracking Bonesy down.

Meanwhile, we still had two games to play and Elmer McCaffrey, who'd won 17 games that year, was starting in Bones' spot in the rotation on Saturday night. Elmer was a big strong farm boy from Ohio but he'd pitched a lot of innings that year and was working on two days' rest, so his tank wasn't that full. We were just hoping that he could hold the fort until Bones arrived.

HOW DID MCCAFFREY DO ON SHORT REST?

Well, Elmer pitched beautifully. He didn't have his best fastball, so he threw a lot of breaking stuff, worked the corners a little more than usual and held the Cards scoreless through seven innings. The problem was that we weren't scoring either, so it was a 0-0 game when we came up in the bottom of the seventh. Spike had Clyde Baldwin batting second that night to get his bat in the lineup a little more often and he led off with a triple. I came up next and hit a sacrifice fly to left and Clyde beat the throw home to give us a 1-0 lead.

We learned that Bones had reached Grand Central Station in what must've been the third inning and was on his way to Flatbush, but he hadn't arrived at the ballpark yet so Elmer kept pitching. Nobody scored in the eighth inning but Bones got to the locker room just as Elmer went out to pitch the top of the ninth.

Dusty Miller led off with a long hit to right center to the base of the scoreboard. Swanny fielded it and threw it to Bobby Russell at second, but Dusty had the throw beat. The thing is, Bobby was standing right by the umpire and shouted, "Yer out!" Dusty knew he'd beaten Swanny's throw so he stepped off the base to argue with the umpire, and Bobby tagged him. Oldest trick in the book.

By that time, the crowd was making more noise than usual because Bones had gotten suited up and was warming up in the bullpen. Elmer was getting pretty tired by then, so he gave up a single to right by Tom Weston and then Gus Connolly dropped a great bunt between the plate and the

mound. It was Elmer's play to make but he was a step slow getting to it and couldn't get Connolly at first and Weston had been running with the pitch and was able to take third when Elmer was throwing to Red Allen at first.

So now it's runners at the corners with one down and that's when Bones came in from the pen to relieve Elmer. I'm not sure who the ovation from the stands was for more, but my money would've been on McCaffrey.

WHO DID HATHAWAY FACE AT THE PLATE?

Stan Frankel, who was a good second baseman, a fast runner and a contact hitter. Bones had to work him carefully and the count was full when he got Frankel swinging at one of those table-dropping curveballs for the second out, and then Jocko made a snap throw to first without getting out of his crouch and Red tagged Connolly leaning the wrong way for the final out of the game, a 1-0 win for Elmer that tied us for first place again.

SO IT CAME DOWN TO THE FINAL GAME OF THE SEASON.

It surely did and it was a classic. Gerald Rackenbusch was starting for St. Louis that afternoon and he'd already won 20 games while Spike sent Bones out looking for his 20th win. We started playing at 1:30 and the game just flew along. Neither team scored a run through eight innings and by the time the ninth started, it had just passed 3 o'clock. I think both teams had a couple hits each but it was mostly three up and three down.

After Bonesy got the first two Cardinals out in the top of the ninth, Dusty Miller worked him for a walk and then Leslie Stevens hit a liner off the right field wall that took a crazy bounce off the angle and he ended up on third while Dusty scored to put St. Louis up, 1-0. We were able to load the bases in the bottom of the ninth when Spike drew a walk off a relief pitcher to bring me in from third with the tying run and send the game into extra innings.

Nobody scored through the eleventh but St. Louis gave us a scare in the top of the twelfth. With two outs, they got two runners on base when Jack Danaher singled to Clyde Baldwin in left. The lead runner tried scoring from second but Clyde nailed him at the plate with a great throw to Jocko to end the inning.

We went to the bottom of the twelfth, when Bobby Russell hit a leadoff single up the middle. Harry Street then struck out on three pitches and Spike was thrown out on a tapper back to the mound, although Bobby moved up to second on the play. Spike let Bones hit for himself and he immediately got behind in the count, 0 and 2.

He started arguing the second strike with Stubblebeard, who was working the plate, but Spike and Charlie Draper ran to the plate and got Bones to shut up. The next two pitches were a duster and a curve too far inside to even the count at 2 and 2, then Bones lined the next pitch to center for a single and Bobby scored from second for the win and the pennant. Heck of a game.

HOW DID THE WORLD SERIES AGAINST THE YANKEES GO?

They killed us. Took 'em only five games. I think we were so exhausted from the regular season that we didn't have any gas left in the tank, but that's not an excuse. The Yankees were a great team, even with a few players missing late in the season after being drafted. They won it fair and square. It wasn't the way we wanted our season to end, but only two teams out of 16 even got to the World Series and only one can win it.

Considering how the previous two seasons had gone, I can't complain. I hit .367 to win the batting title for the National League, had career highs at that point with 25 homers and 107 RBIs and even stole 18 bases. Ended up winning Most Valuable Player, which I did not expect at all. I'd have given it to J.B. Hathaway, who did get Rookie of the Year but without him, we don't win the pennant.

THAT WAS QUITE A FINAL YEAR BEFORE ENLISTING

Yes, it was. A lot of us on the Dodgers had big years, but I was very satisfied because it had only been four years since it looked like my career was over because I couldn't pitch anymore and three years since I'd started figuring out how to hit at the major league level. By the end of the 1943 season, I'd turned 24 and had seen a lot of things already, but that's the year I felt that I'd finally put everything together.

WHEN DID YOU SIGN UP FOR THE ARMY?

The World Series ended about a week into October, so I got home to Tomkinsville shortly after. Even though we lost to the Yankees, we still got a decent Series share that I was able to give Grandma for some fixing up on the house we're sitting in as well as get a truck with a longer bed for carrying crops to market. Anyway, I decided to rest for a month because I was more tired, mentally as much as physically, than I'd been before. It was a tough season.

Grandma and I talked over what I should do because, as I said, I had an exemption because I was the man of the house, so to speak. I didn't want to leave her alone but she said that she already lived by herself between February and September when I was playing baseball and we had a couple of hired hands who could be paid a little more because I was making $10,000 a year by then.

Then Grandma reminded me that my great-grandfather had left the farm to fight for the Union and died in a battle in the Shenandoah Valley while Daddy had spent time fighting in Europe during World War I before coming back to work as a broker. If my country needed me, she said, then I had to go.

So I signed up for the Army in November 1943, went to basic training at Fort Dix in January 1944. The war was on and I figured baseball was out of the picture for at least two years.

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THE KID COMES BACK I

YOU JOINED THE ARMY BUT SERVED IN THE AIR FORCE?

When I enlisted with the Army, they were going to ship me to Fort Riley in Kansas and have me play on the base team there, which a lot of players were doing. But I said no way, I'm signing up to fight in this thing so they assigned me to the Air Force, which was part of the Army back then. I was stationed at Greenville Air Force Base in South Carolina and made a sergeant before heading over to Algeria in April, two months before D-Day, and eventually stationed me in Corsica.

I flew on missions to Italy and France as a tailgunner on planes carrying supplies to troops in both those countries, as well as underground resistance fighters in France. I'd flown on 56 missions without a problem, but the 57th mission was another story and nearly landed me in a prison camp in Germany.

I was part of a crew of four men and we were on a night mission over France when our pilot got lost. He was able to make radio contact so he could get directions, but it turned out the person he was talking to was a Nazi who spoke perfect English and was leading us into a trap. We started taking ground fire, so we turned around and were able to escape without being brought down.

Unfortunately, we'd been hit by some flak and were starting to lose altitude. The landing gear on the plane got stuck so Jim, our pilot, had to crash land in an open field. Boy, did we ever land hard! None of us got killed but we were all pretty banged up. When I came off the plane, my back

was killing me and so was my left hip. But we were alive, so how could any of us complain?

THAT'S PRETTY DRAMATIC, BUT NO PRISON CAMP?

That part's coming up. First, there was the matter of getting away from our landing site because we knew the Nazis would be a little curious. We used Jim's cigarette lighter so we could see a map of where we were and figured out that we were near a place called Dordogne, about 26 miles from Bergerac, 60 miles from Bordeaux and maybe 250 or 300 miles away from the Spanish border. We split up into groups of two and started walking in opposite directions, banged up as we were, because there was no other way out of there. Jim and I were lucky enough to find a farmhouse being used by members of the French resistance so we stopped there for the night.

There were maybe four resistance people there, but the leader was a guy named Marcel who could speak a little English so we were able to communicate with a little work with our hands, like playing Charades. Marcel had an American two-way radio there, which would've gotten us all shot on the spot if the Nazis had shown up and found it.

Marcel was able to make contact with someone, who instructed us to go into Dordogne and take a train to the west coast. Marcel went with me and Jim and got into this beat-up truck that one of the other resistance people drove and we headed into town.

We got on a train, like we were told to, and things were going okay until the Gestapo got on board. I don't know if they were looking for people from our train, but all of us found places to hide. I went under a large skirt of this old lady. They didn't find us and we made it to the coast after that, a place called Dax. Marcel took me and Jim to this house, where Nazi soldiers were waiting for us. I don't know how they knew we were coming but there they were.

They hauled Marcel off somewhere else and we never saw him again. They interrogated me and Jim for a while and weren't very pleasant about it, then stuck us on another train heading east. We were heading to a prison camp named Stalag 13 just over the border in Germany. This was on June 5 of 1944 and me and Jim figured we were cooked.

JUNE 5, 1944? SO THIS WAS THE DAY BEFORE D-DAY ?

Exactly. Sometime in the middle of the night, but before our troops landed at Normandy, the train stopped and then all hell broke loose outside. The train was being attacked by the Maquis, who were what you'd call the resistance's guerrilla fighters. All the German soldiers moved near the front of the train to start shooting back.

While that was going on, Jim and I were able to escape out the back of the train with about twelve other people. We headed to some woods on the side of the train where the fighting wasn't going on and ducked out. The Maquis were able to win that fight and then they found us when we'd figured out what happened and started shouting to them from the woods. At that point, we were free.

THAT'S AN INCREDIBLE STORY

I always figured it was a gift from God. We'd heard of Stalag 13 and there'd never been a successful escape from there. They had a colonel named Wilhelm Klink, the Iron Colonel, who ran a tight camp like a conductor ran an orchestra. If the Maquis don't show up, I'm not here.

SO YOU WENT HOME AFTER THAT?

Not right away, I didn't. Even though the invasion up north meant the Germans were being pushed back, there was still a real war with real shooting. We had to wait for about a month in this town on the Atlantic coast with docks before we were safe enough to get on a boat to head up to the English Channel and then turn left for England.

That crossing was a little scary because the Nazis had some U-boats in the water and one torpedo could've done us all in, but thank God that didn't happen. The Allies gave us pretty good cover.

HAD YOUR BACK OR HIP GOTTEN ANY BETTER?

Of course not. They'd gotten worse from all the walking and train riding and not seeing any doctors. In fact, I didn't see a doctor until I got back to New York because once we reached England, all our time was spent making our way from the Channel to the west coast, so we could board a large ship heading back to America. The doctors in England were busy enough trying to save soldiers who'd been shot up or tripped a land mine, so a bad back and hurt rib wasn't that important right then. Frankly, I hurt like crazy but I was just glad to be where I was instead of some prison camp on the German border.

WHEN WERE YOU FINALLY ABLE TO LEAVE ENGLAND?

I don't remember the exact date, but it was sometime in late October of 1944. As we pulled out from the docks of whatever city we were sailing from on this huge ship, there were something like about 15,000 soldiers on board and we all started singing "God Bless America." I'm not ashamed to tell you that I started crying. Think about it. In October of 1943, I'd been playing right field for the Brooklyn Dodgers in the World Series against the New York Yankees. That was quite a year I'd just had and it wasn't over for a while.

HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO GET HOME TO AMERICA?

Oh, gosh, it must have been six weeks. Seven weeks. I know it was December because we'd missed Thanksgiving, although they somehow were able to feed us this awful turkey-type meat and something like potatoes on the way. That was our Thanksgiving dinner. Cranberry sauce? There was something sort of purple and slimy that was supposed to be like

cranberries, but no way was I going to try that. I'd lost a lot of weight since the first of the year, but not enough to eat something I didn't recognize.

Anyway, we came into New York harbor, passing the Statue of Liberty on the way, and there were a lot of people waiting for us at the docks. There had to be thousands of them, and were they ever cheering for us! This band on the dock started playing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" when we were coming down the gangplank and some soldier touched my shoulder and shouted, "That's for you, Tuck!" Who knows? Maybe it was.

WERE YOU DISCHARGED SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING?

Are you kidding? Nothing happens shortly in the military. Never is the phrase "Hurry up and wait" more true. Doesn't matter if you're in the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines. Whatever branch you're in, you'll be waiting in triplicate for anything to happen and this was no different.

Well, after all the hullabaloo in New York, a bunch of us were taken to Camp Upton, which was where I was inducted and had my head shaved before being sent to Fort Dix for basic training and then being shipped to South Carolina. They put us in barracks and that's when the real waiting started.

I was finally able to see an Army doctor about my back and hip, and he said that surgery wouldn't be necessary but a whole lot of rest would be. I asked him about going to spring training in February and playing ball next year and he just laughed. "You won't be doing anything like that in 1945," he said.

"There's no way we'll approve it anyway because you have a lot of healing to do. That crash landing threw a lot of things out of alignment." That meant two years away from baseball. I should've been happy because of where I'd been that summer, but I could only think about getting out of the Air Force and back to right field at Ebbets.

I finally got my discharge in February after two months at Camp Upton. I don't know why it took so long but, again, the military is a "hurry up and wait" place. I did get awarded a Silver Star when I got my discharge. I gave it to Grandma when I got home and she had it framed, then hung it up on the wall above her rocking chair. You can see it right there. It hasn't moved since she put it there. It reminds me as much about her as what I had to go through to get it.

WHAT DID YOU DO SINCE YOU COULDN'T PLAY BASEBALL?

I stayed here on the farm. There wasn't much of anything I could do outside because of my back and my left hip, although I'd carry some light things from here to there to help out, cleaned up the barn a little, did some stretching exercises, that sort of thing. It was the first year since I was in primary school that I didn't play baseball. It killed me to sit, but what could I do?

DID YOU AT LEAST WATCH BASEBALL GAMES THAT YEAR?

A few. I caught about three or four American Legion games in Middletown. Jess Moore was helping his dad coach the Braves and they let me give the players some tips on batting, playing the field and pitching. I couldn't show them how to do any of the things I talked about, but I tried describing what it was. That was frustrating but it taught me some things about coaching that I'd use later.

A lot of coaches and managers will tell their players to do something and they'll even demonstrate it for them, but you still have to break things down to explain the hows and whys and some of them aren't very good at that. I remembered that when I coached college and Legion ball after retiring as a player.

DID YOU EVER GO BACK TO EBBETS FIELD?

I did go to one game at Ebbets Field as a spectator in early July. The Dodgers were having a tough season, with a losing record and they were sixth in the standings. There were a few old teammates still in Brooklyn. Spike Russell was there, of course, managing and playing shortstop. Fat Stuff Foster and Raz Nugent were still pitching.

Fat Stuff had to be 40 by then and he'd somehow gained weight during a war, even with all the rationing, but he was having to start the second game of Sunday doubleheaders as well as relieving at least twice a week. Tom Swanson was around, too, but he had to play third base because there weren't enough infielders. He was hitting okay because Swanny could hit with his eyes closed, but he hadn't played third for years and was getting eaten alive by line drives.

There were two or three rookies who looked okay. The best one was Lester Young, who was 20 and playing in Red Allen's place at first base. Mister MacManus paid $25,000 for him, a lot of money for a rookie back then, but Charlie Draper told me, "He ain't good. He's Superman." And for a few years, he was. Lester could play all three outfield positions because he could run, but he was best at first because he could catch any throw from the infield. Great hitter, too. Hard to strike out, could hit over .300 and give you 20 homers and lots of RBIs.

The pressure eventually got to him, though, especially after all the good pitchers came back from the war. When you play in New York, you're under a microscope and Lester was a small-town boy from Nebraska. He started drinking after a couple years and by 1950, he was pretty much done at age 25. Lester played a couple years in Pittsburgh in the early Fifties, but he couldn't sober up by then.

WHAT HAPPENED TO SOME OF YOUR OTHER TEAMMATES?

Well, they were fighting in the war, just like I'd been. Bobby Russell was over in Guam fighting the Japanese and Paul Roth was somewhere on a Navy ship in Asia, too. Jocko Klein was in Germany marching to Berlin and

Bones Hathaway was in England at the time, but he'd gotten a foot injury and was waiting to get shipped back to the States. Alan Whitehouse was sort of lucky because he was stationed at the Presidio in the Bay Area, where he lived in the off-season, and played for the Army base team there.

We lost Red Allen, though. He'd been sent to Italy and was killed in Anzio. I was shocked when Jim Casey told me because Red was one of those John Wayne types. A big, strong guy who you could imagine catching bullets in midair and throwing them back at whoever shot them. For years, he was at first every day and people didn't always notice him because he hit line drives instead of homers and might say 100 words all season. He'd always bat .280 to .300, though, hit 15 to 18 homers and drive in between 75 and 90 runs a year. Always. Every year. We're all human and none of us will be here forever, you know, but Red Allen should've lived to 100.

I UNDERSTAND JIM CASEY HAD FOUGHT IN THE WAR, TOO

Well, he didn't really fight in the war but he'd enlisted in the Army after the 1942 season and spent two years as a correspondent for Stars & Stripes. He spent time in some pretty hot spots in Europe and he witnessed a whole lot of action because he'd actually go on patrols with the soldiers not knowing what was coming because he wanted to know what they were facing. I respected what he'd done because it took real guts.

Casey had lost a lot of weight, too. He had always been a chunky guy but when I saw him at Ebbets, he'd really slimmed down and looked pretty good. But he'd earned it.

GETTING BACK TO YOUR 1945 REHAB, HOW DID THAT GO?

The rest did help, although the pain didn't go down that much. Mister MacManus found a good doctor who wasn't a fan or an Army doctor and I finally got a good exam to find out what was really going on with my leg and hip. What Dr. Davison, who was an orthopedist, learned was that the crash landing had thrown my sacroiliac out of place, my left leg was one inch

shorter because there was pressure on my sciatic nerve in my left hip and I was favoring that leg when I walked.

Doctor Davison scheduled an operation to straighten everything out and we did it in late July. I was put under with an anesthetic during the operation, but I felt a lot better afterward and while I was still a little sore, the worst pain was gone.

WHEN DID YOU DECIDE TO PLAY AGAIN?

Sometime in late August. I probably should've listened to the Army doctor and stayed out for the whole year, like he'd told me, but it was driving me crazy sitting around the farm doing nothing but carrying shovels from the barn to the hands working the crops. I'd do a little fungo hitting in the barn to test my hip and it was okay, run a little in the fallow field to test my leg and Harry Cousins would come over from his farm to play some catch and throw some balls in the air so I could catch them like they were flies. I was sore after doing that stuff at first but it didn't hurt so much after a while and about halfway through September, I called Spike and said I wanted to try playing.

WHAT DID SPIKE SAY?

Spike could be a pretty skeptical guy by nature because he always thought things through, not just how they might go well but also how they could go wrong. He said he wanted me to come out for warmups so he could see for himself but if I looked okay, he'd talk to Mister MacManus about activating me for the last week or two of the season. He added that he'd run our conversation by Mac anyway just to keep him in the know.

AND WHAT WAS MACMANUS' REACTION?

He was a lot more optimistic than Spike was. Part of it was that Mister MacManus was looking at his bottom line. The Dodgers were still in sixth and likely to finish in the second division no matter what happened.

Attendance at Ebbets had been down the last couple of years because the war was affecting everyone's attendance and Brooklyn was no different. He needed something to boost interest to end the season with.

Also, Mister MacManus had been good to me and seemed to actually like me as a person. He wanted all his players to do well but he'd fought in a war, too, and he knew my story from when I was in Europe. So what he came up with when I talked to him after Spike had filled him in was a Roy Tucker Night at Ebbets on the last game of the season, September 30 against the Phillies.

Mac said he'd go ahead and activate me so I could play but whether or not I did, there'd be a short pregame ceremony welcoming me back from the war to Brooklyn and the Dodgers. He'd not only let any fan wearing a uniform in for free, which he'd been doing anyway, but he'd set aside a section of seats in right field foul territory so they'd all be nearby if I did go out to my old position.

DID YOU END UP PLAYING ON ROY TUCKER NIGHT?

I did. I came out for pregame two nights before to take some batting practice and play the field so Spike could determine whether I should play. I was pretty rusty after two years away and it showed, but I wasn't in pain and when I told Spike that I felt okay, he thought for a moment and said, "Okay." I didn't play the next two nights, although I took BP and worked out in the field both times and it felt fine.

So the big night came and a good crowd turned out, about 20,000 people for a sixth-place team playing the Phils, who were in last. Just like he promised, Mister MacManus held a little ceremony at home plate before the game, about five minutes where the team thanked me, gave me a plaque and then thanked all the people in the stands who'd taken part in the war effort. By that time, V-E Day had taken place in May and V-J Day in Asia happened in August, so people were in a good mood. It was a nice moment.

Spike decided to put me in right and have me bat third, just like before I'd left. I felt stiff my first time up in the first and hit a dinky little grounder to first for an easy out. Things went okay and even though I wasn't doing much, I wasn't hurting either. In the top of the seventh, the score was tied, 2-2, and the Phillies had two on. The batter hit a high Texas Leaguer that cleared Lester Young at first. I came running in to catch it but the ball dropped between my hands instead and rolled to the scoreboard for a two-run triple. I grounded to first in the bottom of the ninth to finish 0-for-4 but Lester later hit a three-run homer to the upper deck in center to give us a 5-4 win.

So on the whole, I guess Roy Tucker Night went okay. It could have gone worse if we'd lost because that fly ball I butchered gave away two runs, but we did win thanks to Lester. At least when you look at my career stats and see that I hit .000 in 1945, now you know the story behind it.

AND JUST LIKE THAT, YOUR ONE-GAME SEASON WAS OVER?

It sure went fast, didn't it? And just like that, I was back on the farm. Mr. MacManus had given me a check for $1,000 on my night, which he didn't have to do, and I took it back home and signed it over to Grandma so she could pay our hands a little extra for the holidays because they'd worked some pretty long days over the last year.

It was a pretty short off-season for me, though. Dr. Davison did a leg-stretching operation on me in December a couple weeks before Christmas and then I headed down to Florida for training camp in January, a month early. It was pretty obvious on that last day of the season in September that I was a long way from recovered even before Dr Davison operated on me a second time, so I wanted all the time I could get to work myself back into playing shape. It was kind of scary because I didn't really know if I'd ever be able to get back into playing shape. So much had happened.

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THE KID COMES BACK II

DID YOU WORK OUT ALONE AT CAMP IN JANUARY 1946?

Some of it was done alone, sure. I'd do what I did as a kid and fungo a ball back and forth from one diamond to another. I'd sometimes jog after the ball after hitting it but I usually just walked, which was a pretty light workout. If I'd stayed with that I might have been okay, but sometimes I'd take a break from my walk and sprint from one base to another. First to second or third to second, depending on where I was.

That was something I shouldn't have been doing because no way was I ready to run like that, but I was thinking about how I'd run between bases in a game instead of just taking it easy and helping my leg heal by not working it too hard. Sometimes it hurt like crazy but I thought that was part of the process.

As far as nobody else being there? No, I had some company. Spike always came to training camp early because this was our first regular camp since the war forced the Dodgers to train in Bear Mountain, New York between 1943 and 1945. Man, was it ever cold up there. It was also our first year in Vero Beach and Spike had been there since before Christmas because he didn't have family to open presents with.

Bobby was back in California waiting for his discharge. Bobby made it through Guam okay and he did get to Florida a week after camp opened in February but Spike spent Christmas in Vero Beach and I have no idea what he did. Had to be pretty lonely not even having Bobby around.

Raz Nugent was there in January because he'd gone 13-16 in 1945 and Mac told him he'd better show up earlier and get in better shape if he wanted to keep making the kind of money he'd been making. Fat Stuff Foster was around in January, too. You'd never know to look at him, but Freddie was one of the hardest workers on the team. He actually threw me

some batting practice with a local kid filling in at catcher. It was good to see some live pitches, even at half-speed, but I don't think I was ready and didn't hit the ball hard very often.

Oh, that local kid Fat Stuff was throwing to was a high schooler named Mike Todd. He showed up at a couple of training camps to help out the pitchers, who liked throwing to him. Mister MacManus liked him, too, because he was a good kid who knew what he was doing back there even though he was 17 or 18 and never complained.

Mac signed Mike after camp in 1947, sent him to Class A that spring and two years later, he was Jocko's backup when we won our first pennant since 1943 and ended up playing five years in the majors. A lot of times, the 25th man on the team matters in ways that never show up in a box score. That was Mike Todd.

WERE YOUR TEAMMATES SUPPORTIVE DURING REHAB?

Very. They couldn't have been better. I knew that Spike was going to be good because that's the kind of guy he was. Same with Fat Stuff, who became a great pitching coach because he was someone players could always talk to and trust with whatever he answered. Alan Whitehouse and Tom Swanson came in near the end of January and I knew Whitey was going to be in my corner because he was always one of my best friends on the team, but it was Swanny who surprised me.

Tom Swanson was never a bad guy but sort of lived in his own world, if you know what I mean. I didn't expect him to be more than the usual casual teammate who'd give a nod and talk now and then. Instead, he took extra time to work with me, either by hitting balls to me in right whenever I'd get out there with my glove or just giving some words of encouragement to keep my spirits up. After all that time, that was the year we finally became friends.

HOW ABOUT RAZZLE NUGENT?

I saved the best for last. I'd say that of all the players in camp at Vero Beach that year, Raz did more to keep me thinking positive and just laughing at times than anybody. Sometimes, when it seems like everything is going bad for you, you have to find something to laugh at so you don't go crazy and Raz was an expert at that.

One time he dragged me to some high school prom. I don't know how we got in because we were both way past high school, but Raz talked our way inside and he even got on stage to play a clarinet solo and sing a song with the band up there. He was horrible, of course, but I couldn't stop laughing. You had to be there, I guess. Only a few players could've gotten away with some of the things he did. Makes it harder to believe what he did later in life.

HOW WAS YOUR LEG WHEN CAMP OPENED IN FEBRUARY?

Worse. Much worse. I ended up rooming with Swanny in camp because Harry Street was with the A's that spring and one night after I'd tried playing full tilt in an intrasquad game, it started hurting really bad. I even started shouting because of the pain, nothing like I'd felt since I'd been in France, so Swanny looked at it. It was turning black so he had to call the hospital in town.

I was kept overnight at Fisher Memorial Hospital for two or three nights before they discharged me, but not before some doctor told me my leg was so bad that I may never play again. I'd ignored the Army doctor and Doc Davison, but I sure paid attention to him. I spent the next couple months wondering how I'd even be able to help Grandma run the farm.

SO HARRY STREET WAS IN PHILLY? WHAT HAPPENED?

Harry had been drafted about the same time I enlisted and ended up with the Marines. I can laugh now because if anyone had the right mentality for the Marines, it was Harry. Absolutely fearless. It had to drive him crazy

to be in the military because he was all about "Hurry up" and forget the waiting.

Anyway, he did basic training in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and his unit was shipped off to the Pacific Theater. They were fighting in Tanawa when Harry's right leg got shot up bad, way worse than my leg was after the crash landing. He got to see a doctor in Honolulu and they operated on it but there were a bunch of screws inserted into his leg. It was sad because he wasn't even 30 yet. It happens to all of us but he'd have had at least five or six years as a regular left.

HOW DID HE END UP WITH THE ATHLETICS?

Well, Philadelphia was Harry's hometown. Once Jack MacManus learned through his sources in the military that Harry was pretty well done, he called him into his office after he got home that fall and they had a long talk. There wasn't going to be a place for Harry in Brooklyn, but Mac called Connie Mack and worked out a deal. Harry went to the A's and Mister Mack sent maybe a thousand bucks or two, depending on whether Harry made their opening day roster.

So Harry goes to camp with the A's in Florida and I know that Mister Mack was a real gentleman who'd stay with Harry as long as he could, partly because Mister Mack wanted to see a war veteran come back and play for him and partly because they really did need help in the infield. They tried playing Harry at third, then at short, then at second and even in the outfield, but Harry just didn't have it anymore.

About a week before the season opened, the A's had to let Harry Street go and his career was over. Seeing Harry out of baseball hurt because we'd been roommates in my first training camp in 1939. I felt like I'd lost a little of myself. He ended up owning a gas station in Erie and ran it for years.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN LEG?

I stayed in Vero Beach until camp broke, then was taken by car to Miami and then took a plane to New York, when Dr. Davison examined me. My leg wasn't black anymore but it wasn't healed either, so Dr. Davison suggested I see this Austrian doctor, Dr. Rittenbusch about what he called a bloodless surgery for manipulation of the leg muscles, sort of like what a chiropractor does.

Ray Tonelli, who was a second baseman for the Giants, had seen Dr. Rittenbusch a year earlier after his sciatic nerve had problems and he came back to be a good hitter and RBI man for Bill Murphy, who was still managing the Giants at the Polo Grounds. Murph was a hard man and you weren't going to play on his team for sentimental reasons.

So a couple weeks after I'd first seen Dr. Rittenbusch in mid-April, I had to wait a couple weeks for the swelling to go down to see him again. He did some adjustments on my leg, no surgery, gave me three exercises I had to do twice every day and said I'd be ready to go in two months. But I had to do those exercises, so I did.

HOW WAS BROOKLYN DOING WITHOUT YOU?

Really well, actually. I was thinking maybe I shouldn't come back and screw things up. We were nine games out in front in June, even without Bones Hathaway. Bonesy had gotten a bit lazy since he'd done so well in 1943 and wasn't throwing strikes on the first two pitches of a count, so Spike sent him back to Montreal to see if he could find the strike zone in Canada. The other pitchers, especially Raz and a new guy named Jerry Fielding who'd come over from Pittsburgh in a trade for Hank West, picked up the slack.

Jerry was a real find. He hadn't done much for the Pirates either before the war or when he came back, they were willing to listen to offers. Hank had been a decent backup for both Babe Stansworth and Jocko Klein, so-so defensively but a guy who could hit .250 and give you some homers

with regular work. Jerry became a good third or fourth starter for us for the next few years and that 1946 season was sort of his coming out party.

AND 1946 WAS PAUL ROTH'S COMING OUT PARTY, TOO.

It sure was. He'd been a good fourth outfielder for us for years but couldn't really break into the outfield. But when Karl Case was traded to Boston, he finally got a chance to play regularly and was third in the league in hitting about halfway through the season. He tailed off in September but still hit above .300. Not a lot of power but he was a patient hitter who could draw walks and keep rallies going and while he was never fast he was steady and held on to any ball that came his way in the outfield.

We had a kid from Montreal, Frank Havens, who did well enough at first place to allow Spike to move Lester Young to right field and Lester just became a star. All that talent just blossomed for him in '46 and if they'd stopped the season after June and voted for MVP, he probably would've won it. Lester Young in his first two or three years was as good a player as there was in baseball and Lord knows how many pennants we could've won in the 1950's if he'd kept it together.

WHEN DID YOU START PLAYING AGAIN?

It was towards the end of June in 1946. About ten weeks after Dr. Rittenbusch made his adjustments and gave me those exercises, I was feeling really good so I called Mister MacManus and told him I was ready to test my leg. The Dodgers had just left Brooklyn for a long road trip, so he arranged for me to work out with the Yankees, who were at home.

It felt a little weird going there because the only time I'd played before at Yankee Stadium was as a visiting player during the 1943 Series, but they treated me well. The workouts went well, too. I was a little cautious about going all-out for fly balls or down the line after hitting the ball, but there was no pain. By the time the boys came back after the last game of their

road trip in Pittsburgh, I was ready to play, so Mister MacManus activated me in time for a series at Ebbets against the Cubs at the end of June.

HOW'D IT GO AFTER ALL YOU'D GONE THROUGH?

Well, Spike had me sit for most of the first game, which was probably the smart thing to do. The thing is, that game kept going and going until it got to the 13th inning with the score tied at 2-2. I was sent up as a pinch-hitter for Spike himself. The first pitch from Earl Wingate was a duster to welcome me back and then I swung and missed on a fastball, so the count was 1-1. The next pitch was a knee-high curve and I decided to bunt it. It went back to the mound and Wingate threw wide to first, so I kept going. The first baseman went into foul territory to pick the ball up and threw it to second, but it went into center field and Charlie Draper signaled to keep going and I ended up beating the throw and sliding safe into third.

Wingate was ticked off on the mound but what could he do? Yes, Earl, I'm back. He walked Tom Swanson to pitch to Lester, which wasn't very smart on the surface although Swanny had been in situations like this for over ten years and wasn't too affected by pressure. Lester ended up striking out but then Spike sent up Alan Whitehouse to pinch-hit and Whitey hit a fly ball to left for the second out. It was deep enough that Charlie in the coaching box yelled "Go!" so I tagged up and ran home. I could see by the catcher's action that the throw was coming in, so I slid headfirst to tag the base to beat the throw. Game over. Dodgers win, 3-2, in thirteen.

DID THE TEAM DO WELL AFTER A WIN LIKE THAT?

Of course we didn't. This was baseball, not juvenile fiction. We sort of chugged along in July, winning one here, losing one there, not really doing much of anything to build our lead. Then we got to August and, oh boy. It was the opposite.

Jocko split his finger on a foul tip and we only had some kid catcher up from Memphis as a replacement after trading Hank West to Pittsburgh,

so Mr. MacManus had to sign Babe Stansworth out of retirement. Babe had been a good player for years, but he'd been out of baseball since the end of the 1945 season and he wasn't in game shape.

Then Bobby Russell's legs started giving him trouble. It was his first year after the war and Bobby would hang tough with runners sliding in to break up double plays and all those plays at second were taking their toll. Swanny was back at third base because Steve Shiells still wasn't ready and he had a charley horse after getting banged up on a play against the Phils at Shibe Park. Paul Roth and Lester Young, who'd carried the team the first half of the year, had started slumping in July and it carried over.

As a result, we had trouble winning in August and even lost six in a row at one point so the Cubs pulled ahead after they beat us both games of a doubleheader in Wrigley at the beginning of a road trip. Lester went hitless both games to put him at 1-for-21 and you could see he was really struggling at the plate, as much with himself as with the pitches he was seeing. I came to see him in his hotel room and he was swinging in front of a mirror. I saw something in his swing that didn't look right and was suggesting an adjustment when Spike Russell knocked on the door.

WAS SPIKE LOOKING TO BRING LESTER'S CONFIDENCE UP?

No, because confidence wasn't Lester's problem. If anything, his success at a young age kind of swelled his head up. He could play, for sure, but he was more into drinking and chasing women when the games were over and Spike knew it. That didn't leave his legs in the greatest shape to play the outfield the next day and a lot of fly balls he should've caught up to were falling in. Spike knew that too.

So when he came in, Spike told us that he'd sit Frank Havens, who'd stopped hitting and never hit again because pitchers had figured out that he was a sucker for sliders, and that he was moving Lester from right back to first base, putting Tom Swanson from third base to right field, replacing Swanny at third with Steve Shiells and putting me in centerfield.

WOW! THAT WAS A HUGE CHANGE IN THE LINEUP.

It sure was. Four out of eight position players and we still had Babe searching for the Fountain of Youth at catcher. But Spike had to do something because we'd blown a nine-game lead and we weren't showing much fight at that point. Lester didn't like it, though, and said "I may as well go home to Milwaukee." Spike says back, "You could go. The beer's cheaper there and so are the women you'd be chasing. You can spend the rest of your career playing for the Brewers, if that's what you want." Lester calmed down because he saw Spike's point, but it ended up being prophetic.

DID THE LINEUP CHANGE TURN THINGS AROUND?

Eventually it did, but it took some time because you have to know without thinking what every other player on the field will do in a given situation and we had four new guys in different positions. We did win the third game in Chicago but dropped two of four in Pittsburgh to fall into fourth. I think the turnaround really started in the first game of a series against the Giants at the Polo Ground, when Spike had Fat Stuff start.

All of us were surprised because Freddie was about 40 by then and only pitched in relief, but he'd been a good starter for quite a few years earlier in his career and some of his best years had been for New York, so he knew how to pitch in the Polo Grounds and how Bill Murphy thought.

Sure enough, Fat Stuff went all the way, mixing up his junk and throwing it for strikes, and we won it, 2-0. I got the last out hauling in a long fly to center by Muscles Mulligan, running away from the plate when I took it in. After that, we were back in third and on our way.

SO FAT STUFF FOSTER SET THE TONE BY EXAMPLE?

Maybe. Something sure happened. We ended up taking all three games at the Polo Grounds and then beating the Giants two more times at

Ebbets before losing the third game. Bones Hathaway had gotten his head straight in Montreal, where Jake Kennedy was managing by then, and he'd added a slider that Jake taught him. The fourth game against the Giants was scoreless until we got five runs in the bottom of the sixth and went on to win, 7-1, and went past the Cubs into second behind St. Louis with only a week left in the season.

Then Philly came in for three and we lost Steve Shiells when he went diving into the dugout chasing a foul ball and got banged up, although he did make the catch. Alan Whitehouse came in and played third the second game, but that wasn't his best position. Spike talked to Swanson after that game about coming back in to play third again, but Swanny was already pooped because it was late in the year and he'd gotten pretty beat up playing third. Then Spike asked if I could play third? Yes, I told him. I'd played third in Legion ball in Middletown and also a few games in Elmira back in 1938, so Spike put me there and sent Whitey to center.

HOW DID IT GO FOR YOU AT THIRD BASE?

Between all the years since I'd played the infield and how much harder batters in the National League could hit a ball than American Legion or Eastern League players could, it was a real struggle. Fortunately, Razzle Nugent pitched the opener against St. Louis and got off to a great start, retiring the first nine batters he'd faced, and I didn't have to make a play in the field. I was able to single down the right field line to score Swanny and Lester in the bottom of the first, so Raz had an early 2-0 lead to work with.

Things went a little south in the fourth when the Cards got three runs to go ahead. Raz just ran out of gas and couldn't find the plate, so Spike brought in Bones with the score at 2-1. Bonesy gave up one when a runner on third scored on a sacrifice fly to Whitehouse in center and then another one came in from second on a hit-and-run blooper that Swanny had a hard time with in right. Both runs were charged to Raz and he was not at all happy about that, but what the hey? He put those runners on.

COULD YOU FEEL THE SEASON FADING AWAY BY THEN?

I don't think we felt the season was coming to an end, but you could see it from there. It took until the eighth but we finally came back to life. I beat out a Baltimore chop to second for an infield single to lead off and then Spike singled me to second. Two on, no outs. Chase struck Roth out swinging with a curve before Bobby Russell laid a beauty of a bunt down the first base baseline and Ed Stubblebeard ruled he beat the throw so we'd loaded the bases.

Don Lee was the St. Louis first baseman who'd taken the throw from Chase and he was hot! Started arguing with Stubblebeard and sort of lost his mind and threw the ball down. When that happened, Charlie Draper said, "Go, boy, that ball's live!" And so I went home with the tying run. Surprisingly, Stubble didn't eject Lee but he did run Chase for coming down off the mound and shouting the magic word.

WHAT WAS THE MAGIC WORD?

Ha ha, you'll have to read *Ball Four* for that. Anyway, a reliever came in to pitch to Jocko, who hit a 2-1 pitch on the screws to right-center and Spike came in from second to beat the throw and we went up, 4-3.

Bonesy was working on short rest when he came in for Raz and finally started wearing out in the top of the ninth. He gave up a one-out single up the middle to Tony Carone, a bunt single down the third base line that neither Bones or I could get to in time and then he walked the next guy to load the bases.

Spike came in from short and tapped his right arm while looking out at the bullpen. In came Fat Stuff Foster, a guy who was fazed by nothing and who'd saved our bacon so many times over the years. When he got to the mound, Spike started to say something and Freddie said, "Just give me the ball."

Then he struck out Stevie Richards on four pitches for the second out and that brought up Mike Madden, a good third baseman and a left-handed hitter who always did well at Ebbets. On a 2-2 pitch, Madden popped a foul up toward the third base stands and I went after it. I dove over the railing into the first row and caught it for the final out, so there we were back in first place with two games left.

HOW DID THOSE TWO GAMES GO?

We lost both of them, 6-2 and 7-3, so we ended up one game behind St. Louis for the pennant. It was a hard way to end the season because we'd fought like all get out to come so close, but everyone was just worn out from having to fight back from fourth place.

Instead of playing Boston in the World Series, we had to watch the Cardinals beat the Red Sox in seven games. Still, considering how 1945 and half of 1946 had gone for me, I couldn't feel too bad about how things finished. I'd finally come back and showed I could still play a little.

10

HIGHPOCKETS

BACK TO TOMKINSVILLE AND GETTING READY FOR 1947?

As usual. We'd had a decent year in 1946 growing corn, potatoes, green beans and spinach, all good crops that brought in some money so we came out ahead even though I'd had my salary on the Dodgers cut from $10,000 in 1943 to $7,000 for 1946. Grandma and I sat down at her kitchen table in November like we always did and looked over receipts to balance income and expenses. We broke it all down for each crop and then worked on what we'd grow in 1947, which fields we'd use and which field would be left alone to give the soil a rest.

YOUR SALARY WENT DOWN FROM $10,000 TO $7,000?

Yes it did, but you have to understand the place and time. First of all, we were coming out of a war that cost everybody something. We did win it because we had to win, but it didn't come for free. Mister MacManus lost money every year from 1943 through 1946, even though we won the pennant in 1943. Baseball teams weren't toys or tax write-offs for corporations back then. It was the only business some of the owners had and their only source of income. Mac still had some interests in radio, but he considered owning the Dodgers his most important job.

Remember that I'd been gone for 1944 and all but one game in 1945. So that's one game in two years, and I'd come back with a bad back and left leg. Most of us didn't have multiyear contracts so every year you were pretty much paid for what you'd done the year before and if you didn't like it, you could always retire because you were tied to your club until they cut you loose. Nope, it wasn't fair but it's how it was.

That's why I don't mind players getting millions of dollars these days. Free agency has been good because the players can listen to offers from different teams and choose the best one for them. Just like people in almost every other profession. If you worked for John Deere, for instance, and Caterpillar offered you twice as much money to work for them, why shouldn't you be able to move to Caterpillar? Why should sports be any different?

BUT YOU'D HAD SOME GREAT SEASONS FOR MACMANUS

Yes I did, but I have to say this again: Things were different back then. Besides, Mister MacManus didn't forget about me during the war, or Grandma either. Most people don't know that after I went into the Air Force, Mister MacManus gave Grandma $3,000 to help take care of the farm. He didn't have to do that. Then when I'd come back and it was obvious I wasn't ready to play in 1945, he gave her another $2,000 that year and I got another $1,000 on Roy Tucker Night. That's $6,000 over two years and he paid all my medical expenses the Army didn't cover.

No, I wasn't happy to see my salary go down 30 percent, but he'd still been good to me even when I wasn't any good to him. It was up to me to prove that I was worth more than the $7,000 he'd paid me in 1946. I got the same amount for 1947, but Mister MacManus added some bonuses if I was able to play so many games and reach some goals in homers, batting average and things like that.

WERE YOU READY TO GO BACK TO CAMP IN FEBRUARY?

Yes. Finally. I'd come back too soon in 1946 so I took a little extra time to rest and that really helped. I felt looser than I had since 1943 and while I had to learn to hit and do a few basic things all over again, there wasn't any pain beyond the usual aches you get in spring training. We had most of the players back from the 1943 pennant-winning team and everyone felt pretty good about how we'd do.

HOW DID BROOKLYN DO IN 1947?

Not all that bad, but not what we'd hoped for going in. When we broke camp in early April, Spike told us he thought we had a chance to win 90 games and maybe contend for the pennant. Well, we ended up going something like 80-74 and finished fourth. Some guys had good years, like

Lester Young, Razzle Nugent, Jocko Klein and me, but there were others who didn't play up to their potential or their age finally caught up to them.

Mike Mehaffey showed he might be a decent pitcher in 1946 but took a step back in '47. Eddie Stone and Jerry Fielding dropped off a little and Elmer McCaffrey barely won ten games and it looked like he was coming near the end of the line. Fat Stuff Foster was in his 40's by then, still effective but more of a pitching coach. He'd pitch once, maybe twice a week in relief. Roger Stinson was still with us, but he'd hurt his arm throwing a slider in 1945 and was struggling. Raz had a good year, not quite 20 wins, but he needed more help than he got.

Frank Havens was a backup first baseman for Lester and backed up Jocko at catcher; he had some power but sliders ate him up, his defense was so-so and he was back in the minors in 1949. We'd hoped Steve Tracy would be a little better with a full training camp, but he still chased curves at the plate and waved at line drives at third. He ended up playing a couple more years in Montreal but he wasn't up to what Spike Russell expected of his players. Steve Shiells started at third but you never knew what to expect. Very inconsistent.

Tom Swanson was in his mid-30's and had slowed down a bit and Paul Roth was never very fast to begin with, so Spike put me in center that year and moved Swanny to right because he could swing a bat if his feet were in quicksand. Still, I had to cover a ton of ground that year. We didn't have much speed or depth in the outfield so that and the off-years our pitchers had hurt us.

BUT YOU HAD A VERY GOOD YEAR IN 1947, DIDN'T YOU?

Individually, I had good numbers but if we didn't win a pennant or at least fight for one, I didn't consider it a good year. Baseball's a team game and I wish I'd done more to help us come in higher than fourth. I did get my second batting title by hitting about .350 and had something like 22 or 23 homers, I think I just cleared 100 RBIs and I played in the All-Star Game

that year. Yeah, my numbers were good but winning was why we played, so I felt let down after the season.

DID YOU AT LEAST GET A RAISE FROM JACK MACMANUS?

Ha ha, yes, I did get a boost. From $7,000 to $15,000 for 1948. There were players on other teams who were paid more, but it was more money than I'd ever made in my life. I kind of wanted to pinch myself. We had a down year with the crops that summer, so it really meant the difference between making a profit or losing money in 1947. And I got an extra $2,500 in bonuses anyway for meeting some of the target numbers Mac had put in my contract for that year. Those incentives weren't in my 1948 contract but I wasn't about to complain.

DID BASEBALL MONEY HAVE A BIG EFFECT ON THE FARM?

Is that a trick question? It had all the effect in the world on the farm. Remember, we were a small family farm at 25 acres with four four-acre crops. We couldn't compete with these huge corporate farms out west as far as prices went, so we focused on freshness, harvesting crops as soon as they were ready and getting them to market quickly. We contracted with about 10 or 12 stores throughout Connecticut pretty steadily. Some years were better than others, but that's how agriculture goes.

Anyway, the margins would always be a little tight here so making $15,000 to play baseball for nine months gave us money for equipment, repairs, workers and anything we needed that we wouldn't have had otherwise. I didn't have to work in the fields myself like I had when I was younger, although turning up the soil riding the tractor between growing seasons is something I still do even though I'm getting up there in years. You get to see how the soil is doing up close because there are things to look for plus I love doing it. It's peaceful up there.

DID THINGS GO BETTER FOR THE DODGERS IN 1948?

It took a while but, yes, they did. We had a rookie outfielder named Cecil McDade from Bryson City, North Carolina, which wasn't even really a town, and my goodness what a talent! He was only 21 and had already played four years of minor league ball, working his way up the ladder fast. Rocky Point to Boise to Fort Worth to Mobile, then leapfrogging over Montreal to Brooklyn. I guess they might call that fast-tracking these days.

Cecil was on that Boise team that lost 10 players when their bus had an axle fall off and slid over the side of a mountain pass going to Billings for a road series. He lucked out because he'd been called up to Fort Worth that morning and missed the trip. We were teammates for ten years and I could never get him to talk about it. Can't really blame him. Could you?

Anyway, Cecil had everything. He was about 6'3" and skinny, all legs, which is why he was called "Highpockets," and could he ever cover ground in the outfield. Great arm out there, too. Very quick bat with strong wrists, good power and he knew the strike zone. Struck out quite a bit but could draw walks, too. He could even lay down a bunt, but just don't ask him to do it.

MCDADE DIDN'T LIKE TO BUNT?

Or hit to the opposite field. Or hit behind the runner. Or work the hit-and-run. And that was his problem. Confidence was never an issue even though he was always so polite, saying "sir" here and "ma'am" there. Cecil was actually a decent small-town kid but he only thought of his batting average and hitting homers. Cecil figured the money was in those two things. And he was right.

But baseball is a team sport, even though it's the most individual team sport out there, and sometimes you have to sacrifice your own goals so your team has a better chance to win. That's something it took Highpockets almost all season to learn and a car accident to do it.

DID HE TAKE OVER IN CENTER FIELD?

Oh, you'd better believe it. I moved back to right and Tom Swanson came off the bench for the first time in his career. Fourth outfielder, backup third baseman, pinch hitter, that sort of thing. Swanny was a proud guy and didn't like it. Spike Russell had a talk with him before we went north and Spike had a way of getting his point across whether you liked it or not, so Swanny accepted being a part-timer and actually helped us a lot that way.

Paul Roth didn't get any faster in left, but Highpockets and I both shaded a little his way so he didn't have to cover too much ground. As long as Paul hit around .300, we could live with it. It was a really good outfield because we could all hit over .300 and Cecil and I produced a lot of runs. A really good team, in fact. Best in the league.

THAT TEAM DIDN'T WIN A PENNANT SO HOW GOOD WAS IT?

I will go to my grave believing that was the best team I ever played on. I was on five pennant winners and a World Series champion, but that '48 Dodgers team had more talent top to bottom of any Brooklyn team I was ever on. There wasn't a weak spot in the field or on the pitcher's mound.

I've mentioned the outfield, all .300 hitters with two guys who could hit homers. Lester Young had his last really good year at first, Bobby and Spike Russell gave us the league's best defense up the middle and both were pesky hitters who wore pitchers out. That was the one year Steve Shiells put it together for a whole season at third, with good defense and a .275 average with a little power. Jocko Klein had played three All-Star Games at catcher and was at his peak. Not one player over 30 in that starting lineup, and we had Swanny, Alan Whitehouse and Frank Havens coming off the bench.

Our pitchers all had good years in 1948, too. Raz won 21 games and Elmer McCaffrey came back for his last good season and won 17. Bones won 15 and Jerry Fielding and Eddie Stone combined for about 20 wins, mostly spot starting and working doubleheaders. Fat Stuff was still pitching an

inning or two once or twice a week, but that was his last season before he became Spike's full-time pitching coach in 1949.

Then we had a kid named Homer Slawson who was called up from Montreal in May who was a keeper. He was a reliever that first year but became a starter in 1949. Jake Kennedy was still managing the Royals when he got Homer, who had the arm but didn't know how to pitch. Jake took care of that. What a wise old head Jake Kennedy was and he'd keep sending us young pitchers who had an idea. You'd be surprised how many don't. Geez, we were so good that season. Really should've won the pennant in 1948.

DID YOU AT LEAST GET OFF TO A GOOD START IN 1948?

For once we did. It seems like every year we'd usually get out the gate slow but this time we started the year with six straight wins. By the time June rolled around, we were in second behind Boston by a couple games.

Most of us were having good years, although I was feeling then that I wasn't going to win another batting title. I think I was hitting about .280 with maybe five or six homers. That wasn't too bad and I was driving in a decent amount of runs because I came up with runners on base and saw good pitches in those situations, but the hits weren't coming like they did in 1947. I'll tell you this, though. The guy who really carried us for the first three months of the season was Highpockets McDade.

Cecil had 16 homers by the time we got into June and he was hitting well over .300, maybe around .325 or .330. But he'd gotten off to a bad start with the fans and as good as he was hitting, they were booing him. You see, there was just something about him that people didn't like seeing, sort of a nonchalance.

He was already showing he wouldn't bunt or give himself up at the plate to move runners along, and the fans who knew the game could see that. Word spread around that Cecil McDade was a selfish player who only

cared about his own numbers and he did nothing to change that notion. So people started booing him, first in Brooklyn but it caught on around other ballparks.

Jim Casey interviewed him after a couple weeks of this and asked about the booing, and Cecil said, "One team, one ballpark. They're all the same. Including here." Then Casey says something like, "Maybe you don't like Brooklyn." And that young bonehead said, "No, suh. I don't like Brooklyn."

Well, he might as well have been playing for the Catholics and said, "No, suh, I don't like the Vatican." The wolves were really howling after that hit the papers, but I've gotta give Cecil credit. He didn't stop hitting. He'd give fans the bird, but the home runs kept on coming.

THE DODGERS KEPT WINNING WITH THAT DISTRACTION?

We did, yes, but not as often as we had been and we started dropping in the standings. We'd dealt with players being booed before but the distraction for us was Cecil's unwillingness to play for the whole team. With all the little things I've already said he wasn't doing, he would simply not hit to the opposite field. Teams started putting a shift on him and instead of wising up and waiting to swing to hit to left, Cecil would just keep hitting into it.

Even though Highpockets was getting the hits and homers, Spike was getting more and more fed up with him because there were too many times when Cecil could've moved a runner from first to second on a hit-and-run by poking the ball into left, but he'd swing away and hit into the shift. With that extra infielder on the right side, it would often end up being a ground out at first or a force out at second, which really drove Spike crazy.

He called Cecil into his office after a game in Cincy and told him that he could either start learning to hit to left or start learning French because

he'd be shipped to Montreal. It was a private conversation but the locker room walls at Crosley weren't so thick that we couldn't hear it.

BUT HIGHPOCKETS NEVER GOT SENT TO MONTREAL?

No, of course not. Spike's hands were kind of tied. Cecil was still hitting over .300 and leading the team in homers. Even though fans were really giving to him, the team was drawing well and he was a reason, so Mister MacManus would've had a lot of questions for Spike Russell if Highpockets were sent down. But Spike could bench Cecil and send Swanny or Whitey out to make a point, even if it was during a game. He actually did that a couple times but Cecil was so stubborn, he wouldn't change.

AND THEN YOU GOT HURT IN LATE JUNE?

Yeah, we were down to sixth place by then and St. Louis came to town. Don Lee hit a long liner to right and I chased it down, but I ran into the right field wall about a step or two after making the catch. I wasn't unconscious like on that ball Bill Murphy hit the last day of the 1940 season, but I was carried off the field on a stretcher and ended up missing almost two months with a dislocated shoulder. I'd finally got my average up to .300 and had hit my tenth homer that night, so it was pretty frustrating. Swanny replaced me in right and I'm wondering if I'll ever stay healthy for a season.

THEN THERE WAS A "CECIL MCDADE DAY" IN JULY?

Yes, there was. You just didn't see that sort of thing for rookies but Cecil had 25 homers and still above .300 and he was going to the All-Star Game in Cincy along with Jocko and Spike so, individually, he was having a good year. Then a bunch of people from down in North Carolina got in touch with Mister MacManus and said they wanted to pay for a Cecil McDade Day at Ebbets. I think once Mac heard one of them say, "We'll pay for it," it was a done deal.

So the big day comes, there's a pregame ceremony and Highpockets gets a nice red Cabriolet out of it. The fans even played nice for a day, at least at first. Well, that was the high point. We're playing the Giants and it was a scoreless game going into the top of the sixth. New York had a runner on first with two out when a batter hit a high fly to Cecil in center. Cecil had left his sunglasses on the bench between innings and lost the ball. It landed three feet behind him and started rolling. By the time he tracked it down, the runner had scored and the batter was standing on second. You couldn't hear yourself think with all the booing and we ended up losing, 1-0.

AND THINGS GOT WORSE FOR HIGHPOCKETS AFTER THAT?

They sure did, although in a way, what happened after the game forced him to start growing up and thinking about something besides himself. Cecil was steaming when he got dressed up and started driving his Cabriolet back to the hotel he was living in. Along the way, he ran into some 10-year-old kid named Dean Kennedy, who'd run out into the street from behind a parked car for some reason.

The kid had to go to the hospital and ended up being operated on a couple times. It was pretty serious. Highpockets learned that Dean couldn't care less about the Dodgers or him because he was into collecting stamps. It may have been the first time Cecil ever had to deal with someone who didn't fall all over themselves because he was a ballplayer.

Cecil was a decent enough guy, though, and he spent a lot of time with Dean during his recovery. They became friends and Cecil even got into stamp collecting himself. As bad as that accident was, it forced Cecil to learn how to put others ahead of himself for once. He'd changed and was a pretty good teammate after that, although Spike did sit him down for a week in August and put Whitey out in center because it didn't happen overnight.

WHEN DID CECIL FINALLY GET SOME REDEMPTION?

We were in a scoreless tie with the Cubs in Chicago at Wrigley Field and Alan Whitehouse topped a ball to the mound in the top of the fifth. Whitey slid headfirst into first but the umpire called him out on a bang-bang play. I'd never seen Alan react the way he did, but he jumped up to jaw with the ump. Red Cassidy at first joined in and Spike ran out from the dugout to make it a trio. Well, Whitey got the thumb when he said to Red and Spike, "Hey, guys, let's chip in and buy the old geezer a seeing-eye dog," and Spike had to put Cecil back out in center.

Then in the top of the seventh, score still 0-0, and we had Lester on second and Swanny on first with one out. Cecil came up so, of course, the Cubs put on the shift to right like everyone did. This time, Cecil lays a beautiful bunt down the third-base line. The shift meant the third baseman was playing where the shortstop usually was and the pitcher just stood there long enough for Lester to come around third and score while Swanny went from first to third. Then Spike singled Swanny in to make it a 2-0 game.

The Cubs got a leadoff homer to left in the bottom of the ninth but the game ended at 2-1. Cecil surprised us all by making a diving catch for the second out because he'd never left his feet and laid out on defense. From that point, we won the last game in Chicago, took two of three in St. Louis and swept the Reds in four at Crosley before coming home in third place.

THE DODGERS WERE FINALLY PLAYING TO THEIR ABILITY?

We'd had guys go on good runs all year, but we weren't firing on all cylinders until the end of August and it carried through the rest of the season. I came back in time for the series in Cincinnati after six weeks, too. We eventually moved past Boston into second and dogged the Cardinals all of September.

The season came down to the final week, when we had two home series against the Phillies and St. Louis. We took two of three against Philly, with Cecil hitting this monster homer about 450 feet into the center field

upper deck to win one of them, and were a game up on the Cardinals when that series opened.

We lost the first game, 3-2, to fall a game back into a tie, but came back for a 2-1 win in 16 innings the next night to tie it back up. Raz allowed one run over the first nine innings of that one and then Homer Slawson came in for six more. Fat Stuff had a 1-2-3 sixteenth and then Bobby Russell, of all people, hit a one-out homer to left that barely cleared the wall to win it. I think Bobby only had five homers that year, but he never hit a bigger one.

At that point, we just ran out of gas and lost the third game, 4-2, to finish tied for first and then lost a one-game playoff, 6-3, so the Cardinals went on to play Cleveland in the World Series. Tough way to end the season, but we'd lost too much ground in June and July to make up in August and September.

YOU HIT .312 WITH 16 HOMERS SO YOU HAD A GOOD YEAR.

Well, I had good stats and I did get a raise to $18,000 for 1949. But a good year? Nope. It's really only a good year when you play in the World Series, especially if you win it. We all played to earn a living, but nothing will ever beat winning. The only goal anyone on any team should ever set is to be the last team standing at the end of the season. You don't get a parade for anything else.

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YOUNG RAZZLE

COMING OFF A NEAR-MISS, YOU WON THE 1949 PENNANT?

Yes, we did, although I don't think we had as strong a team that year as we did in 1948. It was a different kind of season because we didn't have any big winning streaks or losing streaks and we didn't go way up or way down in the standings like we did the year before.

The Dodgers in 1949 won, or at least broke even, almost every series. When we played three games in Ebbets against Boston, we'd win two of them. If we played four games at Cincinnati, we'd win at least two. We almost never lost two out of three. We weren't spectacular, but consistent. Very steady.

AFTER A WINTER ON THE FARM, HOW DID CAMP GO?

Spring training went fine, although I had a lot on my mind when I took the train to Florida because Grandma had gotten sick right around Christmas and she still wasn't feeling well when I left in February, but we'd had a so-so year with the crops in 1948 and we needed the money I got from baseball so I had to go.

WHAT WAS YOUR GRANDMA SICK FROM?

It was walking pneumonia. Grandma was the healthiest person I knew, even coming up on 80, but one morning she'd gotten up early and it was snowing. She looked out the window waiting for her tea kettle to start whistling and saw that our tractor was outside the barn without anything covering it.

Well, that was my fault because I was supposed to put it back in the barn but a phone call from Spike came in. Spike never called during the off-season unless it was important, so I figured I'd better take it and I forgot about the tractor. I was still sleeping when Grandma saw the tractor so she went outside and was able to put the tarp on herself, but the snow was wet and the wind was blowing so that's what caused the pneumonia. She was in

bed for a few days because of that, although she was out in time for Christmas.

Grandma was better when I took the train down to Florida but she was still kind of weak and I worried about her until we got back to Brooklyn in April, and I was able to come out to check on her. She was doing her usual chores when I got here, but she was never really healthy again after that. I still feel guilty about it.

WHAT WAS THE PHONE CALL FROM SPIKE ABOUT?

He wanted to pick my brain about our starting pitchers. Raz Nugent was sent down to Montreal late in the 1948 season and Spike and I talked about what our starting rotation might look like in 1949 because Raz was going to start spring training in the Montreal camp. He felt because I'd been a pitcher before turning into an outfielder, I'd be able to look at pitchers from both a pitching and hitting standpoint.

RAZ WAS SENT DOWN TO THE MINORS IN 1948?

Yeah. It was sad to see because he'd been such a great pitcher for so long. Raz got off to a good start in 1948 but he was 38 that year and started losing steam as the season went on. He hadn't kept himself in shape for a few years but he'd been able to get by because, well, he was Razzle Dazzle Nugent. By midseason, his reputation wasn't helping him because he didn't have the endurance and his breaking pitches weren't that sharp anymore. He'd always been a drinker, too, and that got worse the more he started getting hit by batters he'd have eaten alive before.

Raz' pitching and behavior off the field weren't helping him right up to this one game at Boston in late August. It was a rainy afternoon at Braves Field, where it was always windy, and Raz was pitching. He was still hung over from the night before and he clearly didn't want to be out there in that wind and rain so he wanted the game called.

We were leading the Braves, 5-3, in the top of the seventh when Raz went out to the mound wearing a raincoat and fisherman's hat and carrying an umbrella. It was funny but when Ed Stubblebeard, who was working the plate, told him to lose the gear and start pitching, Raz wouldn't.

Spike came in from short and told him the same thing, but Raz still wouldn't budge so Stubble came out from behind home plate and gave him the thumb, which is what he'd been hoping for if he couldn't get the game stopped. It was finally called in the eighth, but two of our relievers gave up three runs and we lost, 6-5.

I'm not sure how often I'd seen Spike that mad after we got back to the locker room but you could almost see smoke coming out his ears. He went into the little manager's office in Braves Field with his coaches for a few minutes and then he called Raz in. We couldn't hear what was going on but I found out later that Spike and Red Cassidy ran down a list of Raz' transgressions on and off the field that year and there were lots of them.

Then they told Razzle that he could sober up and start drinking Canada Dry in Montreal because they were sending him down and calling up an outfielder named Jeff Chase to give Tom Swanson a rest. Swanny came back in a week or two but we didn't see Razzle Nugent for the rest of the season, even the World Series.

WAS IT STRANGE TO BE IN CAMP WITHOUT RAZ NUGENT?

Sure it was. Raz was in Vero Beach, of course, but he was on a different diamond and even staying in the minor league dormitory. Both Mister MacManus and Spike Russell wanted him to stop partying and take himself and the organization seriously. I understand he took a salary cut, too. The days of getting by because of who he'd once been were over.

Raz had always been such a big presence for us. A big guy with a booming voice who was always up to something. I'll never forget how he went out of his way when I was coming back in 1946 and tried to keep my

spirits up at a tough time. Raz could be a real prima donna but he was a good guy who never got caught up in the cliques that formed when Ginger Crane had been manager. Razzle Nugent had been a larger than life character, but now life was larger than him.

WHO WAS YOUR STARTING ROTATION IN 1949?

Elmer McCaffrey came back for a great 1948 and started the season replacing Raz as the number one starter. Bones Hathaway was the number two guy and Eddie Stone was the third starter but the real story in camp was Homer Slawson.

Homer had been a fifth starter and long man as a rookie in 1948 after being called up, but he just opened everyone's eyes that spring. He'd been working all winter and stood out in Florida. By the end of the season, Elmer was wearing down so Bonesy became our top starter, Homer jumped up to the two man in the rotation, Eddie stayed as the third starter and Elmer was the fourth man. They were all still in the rotation but their roles had changed.

Roger Stinson was working out of the bullpen with an occasional start during a doubleheader because he wasn't able to give us many innings with his shoulder problem. There was no such thing as a closer back then, but Chris Terry was probably it for us. Best arm on the team and probably the least familiar with the strike zone. When Chris was on you couldn't touch him but when he wasn't, all batters had to do was wait and they'd walk.

HOW ABOUT THE REST OF THE BROOKLYN LINEUP?

It wasn't much different from 1948. Why should it be? We had maybe the best offense in the National League the year before so there wasn't much need to change. Jocko Klein may have been the best catcher in the league by then. Mister MacManus had signed our first black player, a catcher named Sunny Jim Carter who'd been playing for the Indianapolis Clowns. Sunny Jim wasn't as good defensively as Jocko but he could hit as

good and could he ever run. I've never seen a catcher that fast. He ended up being a sort of utility player for a few years until Jocko retired.

We still had an infield of Lester Young at first base, Bobby Russell at second, Spike Russell at shortstop and Steve Shiells at third. A good infield, although Lester had started to slide a little in 1948 and while Steve had what you'd call a career year in '48, he never played quite as well after that. Mac bought a rookie named Tommy Zimmerman from Seattle in the Coast League who was a little like Alan Whitehouse, not as fast but with more power. He could play first or third in the infield and left and right in the outfield.

In the outfield, we had the same three from 1948. Paul Roth in left, Cecil McDade in center and me in right. Tom Swanson retired after the World Series so Whitey was our fourth outfielder that season, which turned out to be his last in baseball. Not as good as the year before, but a good team in 1949.

HOW'D IT GO FOR CARTER AS YOUR FIRST BLACK PLAYER?

Sunny Jim? He had it tough on the road in some cities, especially St. Louis, but I don't think he had the same level of problems on his own team that Jocko did. Cleveland had integrated the major leagues in 1947 and there were a few black players the next year, so he didn't have as much pressure in 1949 as he would've if he'd been the first black player. I'm pretty sure he'd have told me if he'd had problems because we were roommates that year.

WERE YOU? THAT MUST HAVE BEEN PRETTY UNUSUAL.

Back then? Sure it was. Alan Whitehouse and I had been roomies from 1947 through 1948 and we were planning to do it again in 1949. During camp, though, Spike called me to his room and asked if I could be Sunny Jim's roommate that year. He was the only black player on the team

so he'd have to room with a white player, and Spike thought I'd be good for him just in case he started having problems on the team or in the stands.

As I said, we didn't have big problems on the team, although a couple of the Southern players were a little uncomfortable at first playing on the same team as a "negro," as blacks were called then. Sunny Jim was such a great guy, though, that by the time June came around, nobody was worrying about it. When the guys saw he could help us pinch-hitting or filling in at four positions and had a great attitude, the only color that mattered was green because we all wanted to win World Series shares.

HOW DID WRITERS PREDICT YOU'D DO IN 1949?

Most of them thought we'd be pretty good. Everyone was picking St. Louis to repeat, of course, because it seemed like they won the pennant more often than not. Not one writer had us winning the National League, even in the New York papers. Sandy Martin, who was with the Post by then, said we could do it but only if the Cardinals stumbled. Most had us finishing second, third or fourth.

WAS THERE A TIME WHEN YOU KNEW YOU'D FINISH FIRST?

Well, you should think you can come in first in spring training. At least I went in with that goal. Overall, athletes get better year after year, decade after decade, and it doesn't matter what sport. We're getting bigger, stronger and faster because even though God created us, we're always evolving. Every year at camp, you'd see that the average player was better than the average player ten or even five years earlier. There’s always going to be improvement, at least physically, so you should think you're better because you usually are. The thing is, every team has gotten better so then it becomes who's improved most?

Anyway, we were in first place by May but it wasn't until August that we were in first for good. I'd say a few guys were thinking we'd win in May but we all had pretty much bought in by August. Nobody had jumped out to

a big lead in April, which helped, but we were just so consistent. No big winning streaks, like I said earlier, but we never slumped, never lost three in a row that I can recall and we were winning series after series no matter who we played or where. We didn't actually clinch the pennant until there was a week or maybe two weeks to go but when we got to September, we just knew it was ours.

AND YOU HAD RAZZLE NUGENT BACK FOR SEPTEMBER?

That we did. By then, Elmer was our fourth starter but he was starting to struggle a bit. We'd had a few young pitchers like Jesse Dickinson and Rich Ricketts, who Mac called up from Montreal. Spike would send them out in the seventh or eighth inning to see how they did, but they just weren't up to it. Depth was a problem. Mister MacManus knew he might hold his breath, but Raz ate some humble pie in the minors that year and Spike decided that maybe his head would fit through the locker room doors so they called him up after he'd been released by Toledo in late August.

HOW DID RAZ BEHAVE COMPARED TO BEFORE?

He seemed like a changed man to me. Razzle was still a talker because he'd always been a talker, but I think he'd sort of hit bottom in Montreal and Toledo and after the Mud Hens let him go, he knew he had to change the way he was living his life. Raz was over 40 by then so there was only one way to go if he didn't. His talent alone wasn't enough anymore.

HOW'D HE GO FROM MONTREAL TO TOLEDO?

Raz invited me to dinner in Chicago not long after Spike brought him back and told me about it. He wasn't a cold-weather pitcher and, of course, it's cold in Montreal in April and May, so he'd had some tough games at home. Raz finally has a good start in Baltimore but his defense was kicking the ball behind him and between that and someone clanging a cowbell and heckling him in the stands, he lost his focus and got yanked. After changing

into his street clothes, he went into the stands and started belting the heckler and a brawl began.

That was bad enough but then Raz got bombed at dinner after that game, fell asleep in his hotel room with a lit cigarette and it started a fire. They put the fire out but Marvin Mason was managing the Royals because Jake Kennedy was Detroit's pitching coach by then and he sold Raz to Toledo by sunrise next day. After over ten years, Raz Nugent was no longer in the Dodgers organization. Things didn't go any better in Toledo. Raz tossed the manager there out of his hotel room one night after a bender and the Mud Hens cut him before the sun rose the next day.

WASN'T RAZZLE'S SON JOE WITH KANSAS CITY BY THEN?

Yes, he was. In fact, Raz said the night he kicked his manager out of his hotel room was after the Mud Hens played the Blues in KC. Raz came out of the bullpen in the 14th inning that day after Toledo had scored a couple runs to go up, 3-1. Kansas City had a couple runners on base with two out when Grouchy Devine sent Joe up as a pinch-hitter and Joe hit a three-run homer to end the game. Raz probably started drinking in the locker room after that one and things went downhill from there.

JOE NUGENT DIDN'T GET ALONG WITH HIS DAD, DID HE?

Back then he sure didn't. He and Raz never had much to do with each other. Raz was a party boy more than a father, even in the off-season. I think Raz and Joe's mother split up sometime during the war and she and Joe moved into a boarding house in Waycross, Georgia that his grandmother ran. Joe's mom was helping his grandma run the boarding house when she got sick and died during his junior year of high school.

By then, Joe pretty much hated Raz. Raz didn't hate Joe but I don't think he really cared about him at that point in his life. Raz was telling me all this over that dinner in Chicago. I think by then he'd had a reckoning

with the things he'd done. I remember all he drank that night was ginger ale, no booze. Canada Dry, ha ha, so he must've listened to Spike.

HOW DID RAZ DO AFTER COMING BACK TO BROOKLYN?

On that same road trip, Spike sent him out in relief in Cincinnati and Raz got creamed. I think he gave up a homer that hit the top of the Sun Deck in right at Crosley. But you know what? Raz hunkered down after that and worked harder than I'd ever seen him: Beer was out, he cut way back on his eating, was volunteering to throw batting practice now and he'd even follow behind the groundskeeper's riding mower with a rope around his waist when the lawn was being mowed at Ebbets. By the time we left Brooklyn for our last Western road trip in September, he'd gone from 220 pounds to 195. Raz may have lost weight but not his sense of humor. One time he looked down in the shower after a game and said, "Where'd those feet come from? Hey, I never knew I had two of 'em!"

DID RAZ PITCH BETTER AFTER SLIMMING DOWN?

He sure did. All in relief at first. Four shutout innings against the Giants at the Polo Grounds. Fourteen straight batters retired in Chicago. A tenth inning save at St. Louis. Spike finally gave Raz a start in Cincy and it went a lot better than his last time in Crosley; one run on two hits over seven innings for the win.

While this was all going on, we were fighting for first place and on the last leg of the trip, we had a five-game winning streak before we lost in Pittsburgh. Raz fell off the wagon that night during a card game. You know he had a hangover for the Sunday afternoon getaway game at Forbes and the Pirates just killed him. He sobered up after that and I'm not sure that Raz Nugent ever had a drink again.

SO THE SEASON CAME DOWN TO THE FINAL SERIES?

We wouldn't be the Brooklyn Dodgers if it didn't, would we? It seems like our season was always coming down to the final series, usually against St. Louis or New York and this time, it was the Giants.

We were tied with the Giants going into the last game of the season at the Polo Grounds and it's tied 1-1 when Spike brought Raz in for the bottom of the ninth. Raz had won a couple strikeout titles when he was younger but his speed was gone now that he was 40, but he knew how to pitch. Terrific control, he was mixing his pitches, changing speeds and the Giants couldn't touch him.

He pitched us into the top of the 13th, when Cecil McDade hit a triple and Spike singled him in to put us up, 2-1. Raz then went 1-2-3 in the bottom of the 13th to save the win and win the pennant and a trip to the World Series, my third with the Dodgers. And frankly, my most surprising.

WHY IS THAT?

Because we just weren't that great a team. The 1948 Dodgers were much better, I thought, but the National League was just so bunched up in 1949. No great teams but no bad teams either. We took the pennant with only 84 wins, meaning we'd lost 70 times too. Seems like everyone that year had at least 70 to 75 wins and spent some time in first. We didn't win the pennant so much as we outlasted everyone else for it.

SOME PLAYERS HAD TO HAVE GOOD YEARS.

Oh, sure. Cecil McDade, who belongs in the Hall of Fame, had a monster year for us. I think he hit something like .330 with 40 homers and well over 100 RBIs. There were games when Highpockets carried us. Jocko Klein had another good season, hit about .290 with 15 or 18 homers and played in another All-Star Game. I think Bobby Russell had his best year in 1949. For sure he hit over .300 because it was the only time he ever did and he stole over 20 bases, which was a lot back then. I did okay. I think I hit

around .320 and hit maybe 20 homers, drove in around 90 or 100 runs and went with Jocko, Cecil and Homer Slawson to the All-Star Game.

I mention Homer going to the All-Star Game and he really deserved it that season. He won 22 games for us and might've been the best pitcher in the National League that year. I think he had an ERA about 2.50, which was really good pitching in a small ballpark like Ebbets, and I know Homer had over 200 strikeouts. He had a few good years after 1949 but none like that one. Bones Hathaway had maybe 18 wins and Eddie Stone had something like 15 for his best year. Elmer McCaffrey was in his last year as a regular and only started in Sunday doubleheaders during the week. He must've gone 12-4 for us in '49.

Elmer was like Raz, a big boy about 40 years old whose fastball was gone but he could outsmart hitters. And a good hitter still. Not many pitchers could help themselves swinging a bat but he sure could. In fact, Spike kept Elmer in 1950 and 1951 mostly as a pinch-hitter and backup first baseman, although he'd still pitch once a month or so.

SO YOU PLAYED THE YANKEES IN THE 1949 WORLD SERIES?

Yes, we did and this one went all seven games. Elmer shut 'em out, 7-0, in the first game and I got a two-run homer. We went up two games to nothing after Raz got a surprise start from Spike and won, 2-1, going all the way. The Yanks bombed Homer Slawson, 8-1, in the third game but we took Game Four, 4-1, as Bonesy pitched a complete game to put us one away from a Series win.

Well, you probably know what happened the rest of the way. Eddie Stone started Game Five at Yankee Stadium and it was kind of a wild one. We were up, 6-4, and Spike brought Raz in during the bottom of the ninth after Jerry Sands doubled off Eddie to bring in a runner and make it a one-run game. Raz got Tracy Jones on a groundout to Spike at short and that brought up Joe Nugent with two down.

Raz runs the count to 3-and-2 and I will never forget him calling out, "Joseph, me lad, this is it," then sending a fastball that Joe hit out for a walkoff home run and a 7-5 win. Then Homer gets blasted again in Game Six, 6-2, which sets up Game Seven.

Elmer started that one but ran out of gas so Raz came in out of the bullpen during the third inning with the score 0-0. He pitched scoreless ball into the eleventh and then gave up an inside-the-park homer to Joe to end the game and the Series. Doggondest thing I've ever seen. Spike usually made the right moves but why leave Raz out there for eight innings at his age? Why not let Chris Perry pitch to Young Razzle in that situation? As long as I live, I'll be wondering about that.

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SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

BACK TO THE FARM AFTER THE 1949 WORLD SERIES?

It was back to the farm every year after baseball season ended. You have to understand that while baseball was how I made a living for twenty years, this farm has been in my family since years before the Civil War. My great-grandfather Forrest went to fight for the Second Regiment of Connecticut Volunteers in 1862, he left a wife and two children behind on this farm and wound up getting killed at the Battle of Cedar Creek in the Shenandoah Valley.

My great-grandma had to raise my grandpa and his sister from that point on. Thank God she had family and neighbors to help but this farm was all she had. All these years later, It's what I have now. I'm keeping this farm going until I'm gone, when it goes to one of my nephews or nieces to carry forward. I'm not sure who'll get it because they're all out of state and none of them are farmers. Shucks, it may end up being sold, but that'll have to happen after I'm gone because no way will I sign on for it.

YOU MADE MORE MONEY FROM BASEBALL THAN FARMING

Sure I did. There are lots of farmers but only so many baseball players, and people won't pay money to watch your crop of lettuce grow like they'll pay to watch you hit a curveball. I don't know exactly how much money I made playing baseball, maybe $200,000? I got some more from doing endorsements for Wheaties, RC Cola and Louisville Slugger, people like that. No tobacco or booze, though. I could've made thousands from

Chesterfields because they had an offer every season for years, but why plug something I didn't use?

Anyway, I always knew I wasn't going to play forever and that I'd be here when I was done playing. I'd lost both my parents before I was out of high school but they both always told me how important it was to plan ahead, even when I was a little kid. So did Grandma after Mama died and that became so true in 1950.

WHAT HAPPENED IN 1950?

Grandma died. I told you how she was never really healthy after she got pneumonia in 1948. Well, just after New Year's Day in 1950, she came down with a bad case of the flu and this time, she didn't get better. She would've turned 81 that year and people didn't live as long back then like they do now, so she passed away before January became February.

JUST BEFORE SPRING TRAINING STARTED?

Yeah, a couple weeks before camp opened in Vero Beach. Mister MacManus was really good about it. Grandma had been pretty tough on him when she negotiated my first contract back in 1938, ha ha, but he really liked her because she was tough. Remember, he gave her some money during World War II to keep the farm going and even though Mac was what you'd call a man's man, he respected women who hung there and weren't willing to be treated like a little girl.

So Mac and Spike talked and I was told to take as much time as I needed taking care of business here before coming down to Florida. They trusted me enough that when the season started in April, I'd be ready. But what an awful February that was! Between having to arrange Grandma's funeral and making sure that the farm was going to be taken care of while I was gone that season, that was a long, long month.

I'm glad she and I had already planned ahead for 1950 as far as crops and harvests go, but she'd always handled making sure those plans were carried out. This time it was on me because my brothers and sister had moved out of Connecticut years before and had no idea how to run a farm as a business. It ended up being a tough year because the beans we grew didn't come out like we'd planned but Mister MacManus gave me a raise to $25,000 for 1950 and the difference made up for what we lost on the farm.

WITH THAT GOING ON, WAS YOUR BASEBALL AFFECTED?

Sure it was. Who wouldn't be affected? I'd sometimes see Fog, Nancy and Al during the holidays, but they were older and had their own lives in other states, so Grandma had been the only real family I had after Momma died.

Between losing Grandma and having to make all the decisions on the farm, I had a hard time focusing on playing for the Dodgers and it showed. I think I hit about .250 that year, maybe had 15 homers and 60 or 70 RBIs. It was a lousy season and after winning the pennant in 1949, we dropped to fifth in 1950 and never were in contention. Just kind of a lost season for all of us.

YOU HAD TEAMMATES RETIRING OR GETTING TRADED?

Yeah, I did. I've told you about Alan Whitehouse retiring during spring training. He was my best friend on the team even though we were so different as people, and I'd counted on rooming with him again in 1950 after Mac signed Josh Crayton from the Newark Eagles, which meant a roomie for Sunny Jim Carter.

It's kind of stupid now, but back then it was more important to have guys sharing a room on the road because of their skin color and not because they got along. That's how it was. Anyway, Whitey decided he'd had enough and that he was ready to be a stock broker in San Francisco full-time so I roomed with Elmer McCaffrey that year.

I should add that while a lot of owners of Negro League teams lost players to Major League teams and got nothing back, Jack MacManus made sure that the Manleys in Newark were paid for Josh Crayton. He paid the owner of the Kansas City Monarchs, Mister Wilkinson, when he signed Jackson Jones, he made sure the Baltimore Elite Giants got something for Eddie Peters and Mister Pollack of the Indianapolis Clowns made a few thousand for Sunny Jim.

A lot of owners and general managers didn't do that, including one religious guy who's in Cooperstown partly because he signed a black player, but Mac knew that he was taking someone else's player and was willing to pay the teams that developed them. He had a sense of honor you didn't always see in others, including the ones who acted like they did.

YOU LOST MORE TEAMMATES THAN ALAN WHITEHOUSE?

Yeah. That Game Seven in the World Series was the last time Razzle Nugent ever pitched. He was a changed man in 1949 and decided it was time to move on with his life. And, boy did he move on. He went all the way to Fresno, California and managed a bowling alley there when bowling was a big deal, but it wasn't really what he wanted.

Raz had found God at a Billy Graham crusade in Atlanta before moving west, back when nobody knew who Billy was, and Raz eventually became sort of an evangelist himself. Nothing like Billy Graham, obviously, but he'd work at the bowling alley during the week and then travel to churches or rallies in California or Nevada on the weekend and preach a little at them. I don't think he was ever the main guy but he'd talk about how he'd been a drinker and carouser until he came back to Brooklyn and started turning his life around with God's help.

Razzle sent me a cassette of one of his speeches once and I was pretty impressed. He'd always been a big talker, of course, but this was a different Raz. It's so sad that he had a heart attack and died in 1958 or 1959 because

he'd finally found something that gave him peace. He loved sharing how he'd found God, although he'd always say it was God found him.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CLYDE BALDWIN?

Oh boy. I guess now's as good a time as any to go into that. As you remember, Clyde knew a girl back home in Tennessee who was a singer. Jane Andrews. She'd tour a little from city to city, never a star but good enough to find steady work for a few years.

Well, Clyde was a big music fan. He loved swing music when he first came up and then he became a big jazz fan. He was kind of ahead of his time in a way because he got into Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and the other be-bop musicians when only black folks were listening to it. Clyde was a big Duke Ellington fan and used to go see his band play whenever he could, whether we were at home or on a road trip.

Clyde managed to not have to go off to fight in World War II because he got a job at a defense plant in New Jersey. I never knew what that job was but he somehow got his left foot mangled at work and when he tried playing at spring training in 1946, he just couldn't run so his career was over, sort of like Harry Street's was.

By then, Clyde had gotten sweet on another singer. She was with Duke Ellington's band, name of Viola McFadden. Viola had a very nice voice, high like Martha Tilton's was but throatier. Hard to describe but Viola was one of a kind and gorgeous, too, with a beautiful smile. And sweet. I got to know her a little when she had a date in New York or Hartford and Clyde would always invite me and really liked her. She was really good for him.

Clyde had gotten to know her when Duke played dates at the Cafe Society in Greenwich Village and he and Viola fell in love. You might think a white guy from Tennessee wouldn't be interested in black women but

Clyde didn't grow up far from Memphis and there wasn't a prejudiced bone in his body. People are just people, you know?

So after a while, Clyde and Viola decided they wanted to get married and start a family, which meant no more Duke Ellington for her because that meant a whole lot of touring across the country. She wanted to keep singing, though, and had enough of a reputation to book dates at clubs on the East coast and sing with local musicians backing her up, usually smaller ensembles. This was in 1947 and Clyde was out of baseball, so he'd go on the road with her for these short trips, usually in cities between Boston and Washington, and he'd help set the stage up for her shows.

One night Viola had a show booked in Boston and Clyde went with her as usual. What she told me later was that he was at this club helping set up as the audience started coming in and some white knuckleheads started giving him a hard time about being a slave for a black woman, picking the cotton in her dress and garbage like that. Clyde was a pretty big guy who wasn't shy with his feelings so he told these idiots where they could stick their thoughts and he wasn't quiet about it. After a few minutes of this, the dummies left and the show went on.

After the show, Clyde was carrying some equipment out the back of the club to a big car he and Viola used to go to shows and these idiots were waiting for him along with some friends. And they beat him to death! I'd heard of stuff like this but thought it happened in places like Alabama or Mississippi, not Boston. All for sticking up for the woman he loved! All these years and it still hurts like it was yesterday. Black soldiers went to Europe and Asia and died to defend something like THIS?

It ruined Viola. It just killed her. All those dreams. She kept singing for a while but her heart wasn't in it. She started drinking and smoking marijuana but when she got into heroin, it was pretty much over. She died of an overdose in 1950. Two good people who truly loved each other, gone before either of them turned 30. I love this country and we've come a long way over the years but there is so, so far to go. My God. My God!

HOW DID ADDING BLACK PLAYERS CHANGE THINGS?

All for the better, as far as I'm concerned. Good Lord, think of how much better Major League Baseball would've been if guys like Josh Gibson, Cool Papa Bell and Satchel Paige had been allowed to play during their best years. Satch eventually did get in but he was over 40 at the time. Imagine him playing in his 20's or 30's. That Cuban Stars team I pitched against before I signed with Brooklyn was really tough and those guys weren't even a league team then. You can't tell me the best Negro League players wouldn't have been big stars in the majors.

Shucks, look at how much better my own team was with the guys Mac signed from the Negro Leagues. Josh Crayton was one of the best pitchers in the majors before the booze started catching up with him. Eddie Peters? I loved Spike Russell but he never had the kind of range at short that Eddie did. Same with Jackson Jones in center. Both those guys were worth over 30 steals a year each back when entire teams maybe stole 50 bases. You can't say enough about speed and those two really gave us that.

Then there was Sunny Jim Carter. He had to wait a few years before taking over from Jocko at catcher but Spike always found a place to put him on the field. Maybe he'd give someone a rest at first or catcher or in left or right field, pinch-hit here and there. He got a lot of work for a part-time player and never seemed out of place, then he took over from Jocko at catcher and ended up playing in a few All-Star Game.

Every one of those guys made us a better team when five or ten years earlier, they'd never have had a chance to play in the majors. How dumb was that?

BESIDES RAZ AND WHITEY, WHO ELSE LEFT THE DODGERS?

Well, let's see. Bones Hathway got traded to Baltimore in 1953, Homer Slawson was sent to the A's in 1954 after Mister Mack died when they were moved to Kansas City. Elmer McCaffrey retired, although he went on to manage and play a little in the field in the minors. Jocko Klein retired

in 1953 to manage in the minors, which is when Sunny Jim finally took over as catcher after being a utility man for a few years. We did manage to win a pennant in 1952, but everyone was leaving one way or another.

TELL ME ABOUT THAT 1952 SEASON

Josh Crayton had a huge year on the mound. He won 25 games, struck out something like 250 batters and teams just couldn't buy a hit off him that year. Best pitcher in baseball that season. It was Homer Slawson's last year with us and he won 18 in 1952. I think Jocko hit about .300 with 20 homers and Highpockets McDade hit maybe 40 homers and drove in 120, another great year for him.

Mac managed to get Joe Nugent from the Yankees for a couple minor leaguers and Joe ended up being our third baseman for most of the Fifties. He was pretty quiet compared to his dad but a steady, steady player who always hit about .280 for you, hit double figures in homers and converted from second with no problem. Joe Nugent was never an All-Star but he might've been the steadiest third baseman we had on the Dodgers since Jerry Strong got traded. Spike would pencil in Joe at third and bat him sixth every day and never worry about it.

I had my last really good year in '52, hit .325 with 25 homers and maybe 110 RBIs. There were a few decent seasons after 1952 but none of them were like that one again and I got the MVP for it.

Spike hit over .300 that year, too. Don't think he hit 10 homers, which he rarely did anyway, but I know he scored over 100 runs because it seems like he was always standing on second or third when someone got a hit. People remember Spike Russell more as a manager if they remember him at all, but he was such a good, smart ballpayer. He was just a winner, on the field or in the dugout.

HOW DID YOUR WORLD SERIES GO IN 1952?

We played the Yankees. Again. And lost to the Yankees. Again. It was probably my best World Series personally. I hit almost .500 and had five homers, three in a game at Ebbets, and I think I drove in ten runs over seven games. Still, we lost Game Seven at Yankee Stadium. Again. Josh threw a five-hitter and struck out eight, but New York got an RBI double in the seventh and held on for a 3-2 win. After that 1940 Series against Cleveland, we played the Yanks four times and lost all of them.

WAS IT FRUSTRATING TO WIN ONLY ONE WORLD SERIES?

Sure it was. Besides it costing us a few thousand dollars each in winner's shares, you do have pride in what you're doing. Losing four times to the same doggoned team, especially one that plays in the same city you do? It wears on you. That's just a fact.

But, you know what? I can't feel bad about winning only one World Series because a lot of good players, better than I was, never played in one. Look at Ernie Banks. What a great ballplayer and a great guy. Didn't win one single pennant with the Cubs in all those years. Hey, I played on five teams that won the National League championship. Ernie hit a lot more homers than I did, he won two MVPs and is in the Hall of Fame now. Think he'd have traded that to play in one World Series, let alone five? I believe he would.

WHAT SORT OF SUPERSTITIONS DID THE PLAYERS HAVE?

Boy, I have to think about that one. I know I'd tap all five corners of the plate every time I batted as sort of a salute to my parents, who never saw me play except for Momma watching me play Legion ball. I'd never step on foul lines, which was common, but beyond those things, I didn't really have superstitions.

Other players, though? Well, let's see. Raz Nugent had a few of them. He'd never eat breakfast the morning he'd start a game. He'd toss his glove over the foul line after getting the third out, then rearrange the fingers to

face third base. Rats Doyle wouldn't take a taxi before he got a start. He'd ride a bus or even walk to the ballpark when he could. Jerry Strong would carry his own bats to the locker room and back to the hotel. Paul Roth was Catholic and he'd do the Sign of the Cross every time he went up to hit.

Gee, who else? Elmer McCaffrey was always the last one on the field when he'd start a game. Tom Swanson would always step on second heading to the outfield and he'd stick his chewing gum on his cap whenever he had two strikes on him. Yuck! Fat Stuff Foster had what he called his lucky socks that he'd wear for every game until they rotted off.

The later guys didn't have a lot of superstitions but when I first came up? Lots of them did. It was part of the game.

DID YOU EVER TIRE OF PLAYING AT EBBETS FIELD?

No, I can't say I ever did, although playing day after day could get to be a grind once you got to August and especially September. That's a long season, 154 games over six months with all that time on trains and in hotel rooms. Playing hard every day could wear you down when the days and cities started sort of running together. Is it Wednesday or Thursday? You're in Cincinnati one day, then St. Louis the next day. Don't ever let anyone tell you they don't get worn down playing baseball, especially now that they play coast-to-coast in so many more cities.

But Ebbets Field? I always liked playing there as long as I wasn't pitching. Most players did, even on the visiting teams, because it just had a feel all its own. Batters liked it more than pitchers, for sure, because the field wasn't that big compared to a Braves Field in Boston or Forbes Field in Pittsburgh. Ebbets was just an intimate place and the fans were right on top of you. They were a lot nicer to us Dodgers players than guys on visiting teams, but fans at Ebbets usually knew the game pretty well and if you were on one of the other teams, they'd let you know they liked you if they thought you played the right way.

BY THE 1950'S, WAS EBBETS STARTING TO SHOW ITS AGE?

Weren't we all? Seriously, yeah, it was. Ebbets had been around for 25 years or so when I started playing there but by the mid-Fifties, it was well over 40 years old. Mister MacManus had done some things to fix it up but it was always a fairly small ballpark and there was only so much room to add things.

Take the locker rooms, for instance. I never spent time in the visitors' locker room but I imagine it was smaller than ours was and ours just didn't have a lot of space. None of the old ballparks did. We had enough room to cram our street clothes in after we'd pulled out our jerseys and pants, but he had to sit on these wooden benches whenever we changed clothes. It's a miracle that Chiselbeak ran things as smoothly as he did.

The shower room was small. We'd have to take turns, in shifts, after a game to shower and get the dirt and sweat off. If you were one of the last players to get into the showers, forget having warm water because it was usually gone by then. Those were quick showers. We only had four toilets and one urinal for 25 ballplayers. That's all I need to say about that. The trainer's room was tiny, too. We finally got a whirlpool in the early Fifties but it took up most of the space. Everything was cramped.

Nobody really noticed when I started because, like I say, all the ballparks were like that. I think once the Braves moved to Milwaukee, things started changing because County Stadium was a newer place that was expanded for big league baseball. The visitors locker room was bigger than most home locker rooms and I think that's when players started thinking maybe they could have a bigger clubhouse in their own ballparks, too, but there wasn't a strong players union to push for it back then.

So that's where things stood by the mid-Fifties. We were still popular in Brooklyn and people were still coming out to watch us, but Ebbets Field's best days were behind it and there wasn't enough parking. Mister MacManus was losing money and tried to get help from the government to

find a place to build a new ballpark because he'd been losing money in Flatbush. The City of New York wasn't interested, though, or at least one guy named Robert Moses wasn't, so Mac finally had no choice but to sell the team. He signed a deal with a bank lawyer who was from Brooklyn because Mac believed the team would have a chance of staying.

Instead, the bank lawyer broke off all communication with the City and announced the Dodgers would be moving to Los Angeles after the 1957 season and play at Wrigley Field until the LA government helped him build a new ballpark there. Just like that. Brooklyn had one year of baseball left before the team was going to pull out.

I think about whether the Dodgers would still be in Brooklyn if they could've gotten a new ballpark like Mac hoped for. I don't think the bank lawyer ever really wanted to keep the team there even though it was his hometown. He was all about making money and he did make a lot of it in Los Angeles, even if it meant breaking millions of hearts to do it. No profit in people's hearts, I reckon.

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SCHOOLBOY JOHNSON

YOUR LAST YEAR IN BROOKLYN ENDED WITH A PENNANT?

It did. None of us expected it, least of all the fans. Once word got out during spring training that Mister MacManus was selling the Dodgers and that the bank lawyer who was buying us was going to move the team to Los Angeles instead of trying to get a new ballpark, things changed. There weren't nearly as many people in the stands at Ebbets in 1957, and the atmosphere was gone. There used to be a sort of buzz during games but not that last year. It felt like a season-long funeral. I guess in a way, it was.

DID PEOPLE BLAME JACK MACMANUS?

Sure, some folks did. Even a few of the writers in the papers did, but what was he supposed to do? Ebbets Field was over 40 years old by then and it was wearing down. There wasn't much Mac could do about that. The neighborhood around Ebbets was wearing down, too, and there just wasn't enough parking there. He'd been trying for about five years to get a new ballpark for us, even outside Brooklyn, but the City of New York wasn't going to do anything for us or for the Giants, who were having their own problems at the Polo Grounds.

Another thing that was really hurting us by then was television. Mister MacManus had made his money in radio, you know, and radio was great for the Dodgers and baseball in general because people would listen to games and then wanted to go to games to see for themselves. TV was different, though. People could see for themselves for free, and in their own living room. More and more folks were driving after the war ended, but who wanted to fight traffic and try to find a place to park so they could pay to get in when they could skip all of that and watch games from home? It wasn't just the minor leagues that were hurt by television.

HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO STAY FOCUSED THAT LAST YEAR?

Right from the beginning in Vero Beach after the sale was announced, Spike Russell called a team meeting in the camp dining room. He explained the situation, which we all knew anyway, but then he reminded us that we were members of the Dodgers because we were professionals. That we were in that dining room because in a nation of over 100 million people, we'd proven that we were among the 400 best at what we did for a living. That we were going to be paid the same whether the checks were signed in Brooklyn or California, and that we still had 154 games to play no matter what city's name was on our jerseys.

Show some pride, boys, Spike said. We still have a job to do. Stuff all that off-the-field garbage because that was out of our hands. Play today's doggoned game today and let tomorrow worry about itself, sort of like it says in the Bible. If we're going to be owned by someone who makes us move out to Los Angeles, he said, get some wins and make it more expensive for them to pay you. That got everybody's attention and we were pretty focused after that, although Spike would occasionally have to remind us what we were there for. A strange year.

AND THEN YOU WERE SENT TO THE MINORS THAT JUNE

Yeah, I was. I wasn't happy about that but I really couldn't blame Mac or Spike. I'd had a so-so year in 1956, hitting something like .260 with 12

homers, and my legs were just about gone by then. I could still swing the bat but I turned 37 in 1956 and I wasn't beating out grounders like I used to and fly balls I used to track down easily were dropping in on me. As the saying goes, time is undefeated and all those years, plus the injuries on the field and in France, were catching up to me. I'd seen it happen to Eddie Davis, I'd seen it happen to Tom Swanson and now it was happening to me.

So we got to June and I was hitting maybe .210 or .220 and only had a couple homers. Spike was sitting me more and more and after a couple months, a guy named Terry Cross, who'd come up from Montreal in 1955, had taken my starting job in right field. Even with all that, I was totally surprised when Spike called me into his office at Ebbets and said he wanted me to go down to Nashville for a month.

WASN'T NASHVILLE A DOUBLE A TEAM? NOT MONTREAL?

Nashville was in the Southern Association, the Dodgers' AA affiliate. I won't lie. I couldn't believe that I was being dropped below Montreal and AAA after all I'd gone through for Brooklyn over the years. I was pretty steamed and I told Spike I'd rather retire than go to AA. Then Spike explained why I was being sent to Nashville.

First, he said, I'd still be paid my major league salary, which had been $35,000 in 1956 before it was cut to $30,000 that year, which was still pretty good. He and Mac discussed it and agreed that a cut wasn't called for. He then asked how I felt about playing third base, because that's why I was being sent down.

Ray Martin had been our third baseman in Brooklyn for a few years but he'd broken his leg in May and Spike was having to play there. He hadn't been the regular shortstop since Mac bought Eddie Peters from the Kansas City Monarchs in 1954, but he'd fill in here and there. Eddie was one of our fastest guys with a great glove so Spike wasn't going to move him.

Spike knew I'd played third in Legion ball and at Elmira when I wasn't pitching, as well as a few games when Steve Shiells got hurt, so his plan was to keep third warm in Brooklyn while I spent a month re-learning how to play it. Maybe I'd be called up and maybe I wouldn't, he said, but that was what I'd have to do to keep from being released.

I suppose I could've retired but $30,000 was a lot of money in 1957, a lot more than the farm would ever bring in, so there really was no choice. Jerry Sands, the old Yankees outfielder, was our traveling secretary by then and he booked a train from New York to Tennessee and back to the minors I went for the first time since 1939.

HOW DID YOUR TIME IN NASHVILLE GO?

Nothing against Nashville or the people there, who were nice to me, but I didn't like it. There's a reason the minor leagues are called the MINOR leagues. Tiny ballparks, tiny locker rooms, bad lighting, rocky infields. Boy, did I ever see some bad hops there.

Travel was pretty rough, too. We rode the bus for hours and hours to places like New Orleans, Atlanta, Little Rock and what have you. Not good for the back, I guarantee you. And there was the food. You get used to nice restaurants in the majors so to go from that to roadside diners where everything was fried? My stomach never felt settled while I was there.

BUT YOU DID PLAY THIRD BASE EVERY DAY?

That I did. Our manager in Nashville was Elmer McCaffrey, who stayed with the organization after retiring as a pitcher. Geez, Elmer must've been pushing 50 by then but he looked the same, a big old Ohio farm boy. He was great to play for. He'd just put me out at third, bat me sixth every day and tell me don't worry about errors because I wasn't going to be ready to play third in Brooklyn right away. No pressure, just play my way back.

BUS RIDES AND FRIED FOODS ASIDE, HOW'D THINGS GO?

Pretty good, eventually. It took a week or two to get into a groove batting and a little longer to get used to playing third with those bumpy infields, but my last couple weeks in Nashville went well. Once I got used to pitchers who didn't have the kind of control I was used to seeing, I learned to wait on pitches and take walks if I didn't get a good one to hit. I think I had a 10-game hitting streak when I was called up and hit two or three homers down there, but the main thing was to get on base and I did that.

In the field, I must've had five errors my first week with the Vols because my reflexes weren't up to playing the infield and I was fighting those bad hoppers. Elmer would tell me to just relax and play the ball, don't let it play you. We had a ten-game homestand at Sulphur Dell just before I was called back up and that really helped because Elmer was able to get two or three guys from the Vanderbilt University team who were taking summer classes to come out for a few extra workouts.

We had a drill they apparently do in Japan called the Hundred Fungo Drill, when a guy standing at the plate with a bat would fungo ball after ball at me, one right after the other. I'd dive to my left, then dive to my right with no time to think. I know it was a hundred balls because Elmer was off to the side counting them. I'd always thought Elmer was my friend, ha ha. I'd feel like death warmed over when it was done but that really helped.

DID YOU HIT AGAINST SPEEDY MASON IN AUGUSTA?

Yes indeed. Speedy had some good years with the Giants in the Forties and Fifties, never 20 wins but always 12 to 15, a very steady pitcher with good control. Well, Speedy was even older than I was and the Braves had cut him in training camp that spring. He signed with Augusta and was pitching once or twice a week for them, usually starting the second game of doubleheaders like Elmer used to in Brooklyn.

We were wrapping up a series in Augusta and Speedy was out there for the Sunday getaway game. Those usually were scheduled for seven

innings but this one went ten before Speedy beat us, 2-1. Speedy couldn't throw fast anymore but he'd mix up his pitches, moving the ball in and out, and his changeup was so good it made his fastball seem faster than it was. I got one scratch single off him and he just outsmarted us. I was talking to him after the game and he asked me to remember him if I got called back up to Brooklyn. I did and he may have meant the pennant for us.

HOW WERE BALLPARKS IN THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION?

They were small. I guess you'd call them interesting, too. In Atlanta, there was a Magnolia tree in deep center field at Ponce de Leon Park that used to be in play before the owner brought the fence in 50 feet. Engel Stadium in Chattanooga had a center field that seemed to go forever. There was always something going on there. I did like playing at Rickwood Field in Birmingham. It was older but it may have been the nicest of the places I played at down there.

Sulphur Dell, our home field in Nashville, was a little different. I was glad to be playing third there because the outfield would have been a chore. Right field was something like 260 feet from home plate and there was an incline near the fence all the way around so you had to run uphill after deep fly balls. Sulphur Dell was close to a dump, too, so when the wind was blowing from one direction? Peee-YEEEW!

WHEN DID YOU GET CALLED BACK UP TO BROOKLYN?

It was not long after the Fourth of July. The Dodgers were third in the standings but just kind of shambling along. We had some good players but there was something missing. Tommy Zimmerman was the first baseman, an okay player but not a Red Allen or Lester Young, or at least a younger Lester. Bobby Russell was still at second. Gosh, I think it was about his 15th year by then. Bobby's speed was mostly gone but he knew how to play hitters, he was a smart base runner if not a very fast one anymore and he'd finally learned to not agitate people so much. Ed Peters was a very nice shortstop, absolutely zero power but he could fly and got to balls that no

other infielder could. Then there was third base. Spike hung in there while I was gone, but he seemed relieved more than anything when I came back.

The outfield was pretty good. Jackson Jones was out in center, a guy with wheels who came up from the Negro Leagues like Eddie Peters and Sunny Jim Carter had. Jackson was skinny as a whippet but he had more power than you'd think, maybe hit 15 to 20 homers a year. Cecil McDade had moved to left and, well, Highpockets was Highpockets. A .300 average, 25 homers and 90 RBIs every year. It was like winding up a clock with him. Terry Cross was okay in right, maybe a .275ish hitter with a homer here and there, not fast but a good glove, a decent throwing arm.

Sunny Jim had bounced between catcher, first and the outfield for a few years until Jocko Klein retired after 1953. Sunny Jim wasn't as good defensively or calling pitches as Jocko had been, but he could run as fast as any catcher I've seen, had good power for being only 5'8" or so and pitchers did like throwing to him because he kept the ball in front of him and he was always positive. Always. Great team guy, Sunny Jim Carter.

HOW ABOUT THE PITCHING STAFF?

We had a few good pitchers but not a lot of depth. Josh Crayton was a big lefty who'd come to us in the early Fifties. Great stuff but not always great control. A couple of younger guys, Long John Stetson from Texas and Cal Mitchell, had been up for a few years. Mitch wasn't all that fast but he threw strikes and got by more on smarts than talent.

Long John was something else, though. He must've been 6'6" and so skinny he could take a shower in a shotgun barrel. All arms and legs and he'd twist around from Lord knows how many angles and out came the ball. Long John's fastball moved but you knew with all those gyrations that his arm wasn't going to last. He started having elbow problems the first year in L.A. and was out of the game by 1960. Long John Stetson. One of a kind.

THE MOST TALENTED ONE WAS SCHOOLBOY JOHNSON?

Elwood "Schoolboy" Johnson. He was a specimen. Must've been 6'3" and 200 pounds. A terrific athlete. I think he'd run the 100-yard dash in 9.5 seconds at UCLA, a good number for a guy that big. Schoolie probably had as much natural talent as any pitcher I've ever seen. His fastball had to hit at least 95, his curveball could freeze batters because it had such a sharp break and nobody could do a thing with his slider when it was working. Schoolie had everything but self-control when things got tough.

SCHOOLBOY HAD TROUBLE HANDLING ADVERSITY?

To put it mildly. Take my first game back, for example. We played Cincinnati at Ebbets and Schoolboy started. Just rolling along like Old Man River for inning after inning and he had a 2-1 lead after eight innings. Then he gave up a walk on a close 3-and-2 pitch in the top of the ninth and fell apart. Gave up three runs to fall behind, 4-2, threw his glove after the inning was over and then kicked it into the dugout.

I guess he'd been like this all season and had trouble finishing a game he'd been dominating hitters in. It was a problem for Fat Stuff Foster, who was pitching coach, and especially for Spike. We won the last two games over the Reds but that's why we bought Speedy Mason from Augusta after the series.

WAS THAT ON YOUR RECOMMENDATION?

Probably more on Elmer McCaffrey's recommendation because he'd seen Speedy all season managing Nashville and used to pitch against him. Spike, Fat Stuff, Red Cassidy and I were talking on the train heading to St. Louis for a Western road trip and I sure put in a good word for Speedy. Schoolboy should've been our top starter but his immaturity made him a fourth starter instead.

Spike brought Speedy up as much to be a mentor for Schoolie, who he was assigned to room with, as to bring stability to the rotation. We were

only a game out of first by then so we didn't need our own pitchers beating themselves like Schoolie was doing.

DID SPEEDY PITCH WELL AND SERVE AS A ROLE MODEL?

It took him a while. After we split four games against the Cards at Sportsman's Park, we went to Chicago and won the first two before Schoolie blew his cool again and lost the third game. Then it was on to Cincinnati and Speedy got his first start at Crosley Field on a rainy night. There was a one-hour delay in the second, but we came back out and built up a 6-3 lead before there was another rain delay in the seventh.

Speedy wasn't getting his breaking stuff over when we came back a second time and he gave up a couple runs in the top of the eighth with nobody out so our lead was cut to 6-5. At that point, Spike pulled Speedy for Schoolie, who had five strikeouts over the last two innings for the save.

Even though Speedy got the win, Spike sent him back to the bullpen and rarely used him. Speedy decided he'd be better off in Augusta and quit, which surprised me because he didn't seem so proudful earlier that year. And if that wasn't enough Red Cassidy got banged up in an accident while riding a taxi and was out for a week, so Spike had to coach at third, manage the team and be ready to go into a game on a moment's notice. Some way to end a road swing.

DID SCHOOLBOY STRUGGLE WITHOUT SPEEDY THERE?

They'd only been roommates for a while and were still figuring out how to get along with each other. There was a real generation gap because Speedy had been through everything a pitcher can in this game while Schoolie hadn't been around long enough to know when it's time to shut up and listen.

Schoolie did have a great start after we got back home from the road trip, though. He had a no-hitter going against Pittsburgh in the top of the

ninth when one of the Pirate batters blooped a single to right that Terry Cross was late breaking in on. He got the third out and the win, but the dumb kid was still mad about that hit when he got in his car in the parking lot and plowed into a car driven by my niece Maxine, who was staying with me in Brooklyn while she was starting a new job as a window designer.

MAXINE WAS YOUR NIECE AND NOT YOUR DAUGHTER?

Right. There's a book about that season saying she was my daughter but I never got married, let alone had any kids. Maxine is my brother Fog's daughter and she finished her degree from Penn State that spring. She'd just gotten a job with Gimbel's doing window displays in July so that's why she was staying in the apartment I rented in Manhattan after I got back from Nashville. I slept on the couch that summer because Maxine got the bedroom. Believe me, I remember.

There were a lot of errors in that book, but what can I do? I can't go back in time and tell the author to change stuff and, besides, he'd done all right by me in the other seven books so I guess he had this one coming. Still, I have to laugh whenever someone asks me, “How’s your daughter?”

DID SCHOOLBOY CALM DOWN AFTER THE ACCIDENT?

If anything, he got worse. He didn't pitch all that bad and we were in second by the end of August but Schoolie still couldn't control himself. First he gets into it with George Morris, a little second baseman for the Giants. Morris wasn't big but he was tough, like one of the Dead End Kids in the movies. Schoolie showed him up early in one game, then George cut him up when Schoolie was sliding into second and he lost his temper again.

Then in Chicago, he was at the plate and yapping at Dave Hanlon, who beaned him and sent him to the hospital even though we were wearing batting helmets by then. That may be when Schoolboy Johnson finally got the message because he finally shut up, cooled down and started listening for once.

Mac and Spike had been able to talk Speedy Mason out of going back to Georgia and that's when Speedy started making a difference. Spike gave him a couple starts and he won both of them and he started working with Schoolie and Fat Stuff to learn how to actually pitch. We kept creeping up on Milwaukee and we tied them for first after Speedy threw a no-hitter in the first game of four against Philly at Ebbets in a series to end the season.

IT CAME DOWN TO THE FINAL SERIES OF THE SEASON?

Yet again. I don't know how many times our season boiled down to the final series, although this was the first time it was against the Phillies. Well, we win two of the first three games against Philly while the Braves win two out of three against the Cubs at County Stadium so we're all down to the last game of the year.

Schoolie starts it and we go ahead, 1-0, in the bottom of the fourth when Terry Cross gets the biggest single of his life, moves to second when Tommy Zimmerman flies out to right and then I single down the third base line to score Cross, who was running on the pitch because we were two down.

Schoolie screwed up big in the top of the fifth when he walked the leadoff batter, who eventually got to third with two out on a single to right. The Phillies third base coach then shouted, "Lemme see that ball!" like he's an umpire, and Schoolie rolled the ball to third. Well, time hadn't been called so the ball was live, and the runner ran home to tie it up.

We got back in the lead in the bottom of the fifth when Bobby Russell walked and Cecil McDade hit a homer over the screen in right, but then the Phils tied it back up in the top of the eighth, 3-3. Part of that was my fault because I let a double-play grounder go through my legs into left and a runner on third scored. Boy, did I feel like an idiot after that one.

DID THE GAME GO INTO EXTRA INNINGS?

Not this one. We got one in the bottom of the eight to up, 4-3. Sunny Jim singled to right, went to second when Schoolboy bunted him over and eventually I came up and hit a long single toward the Abe Stark sign under the scoreboard to bring in Sunny Jim. Then Schoolie went out for the top of the ninth, got two pinch-hitters out and then got his eleventh strikeout on three pitches to end the game. We had to wait for the score from Milwaukee but when the Cubs beat the Braves, 4-3, the pennant was ours.

AND IT WAS ON TO THE WORLD SERIES

Yep. Fifth time in my career and fourth time against the Yankees. We ended up losing, four games to two, so I never beat that team in a World Series. It'd be easy to say we were always worn out from having to fight to the end of the season while the Yanks always won by ten games so they were relaxed coming in, but that was a great team. There's a reason they always won the American League. Still, it would've been nice to beat them just once. I hit five homers against them in 1952 and we still lost.

Game Six was at Ebbets Field, Josh Crayton got beat, 4-2, and that was it. Last major league game ever in Brooklyn. It was sold out but still wasn't as loud as it used to be at Ebbets. It was sad for all of us, the players and the fans, and I can't lie that I cried when the game was over. Everyone was crying. Brooklyn was the only team I'd ever played for since 1939 and now there wasn't even going to be a team there in 1958.

I will say this, though. It went okay for Schoolboy Johnson in the long run. He got to go home to pitch after he was married that winter. Yeah, to Maxine. Give her credit for helping turn him into a decent human even when I couldn't figure out what she saw in him when he was such a lunkhead, so she went to California with Schoolie and the rest of the team. But I stayed home and my playing career was done.

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EXTRA INNINGS

DID YOU CONSIDER GOING WITH THE DODGERS TO LA?

Maybe for about five minutes. Maybe. Alan Whitehouse and Raz Nugent, who went by Franklin Nugent whenever he was preaching on the weekends, both said it was nice out there and that I should at least think about it. Whitey had lived in the Bay Area for a decade by then and Raz had been in Fresno, which is farther inland, for a few years. Whitey mentioned how balls flew out to left field at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles and that it was probably the nicest ballpark west of the Mississippi River.

There were three things that made my mind up for me. One was the farm here. I'd been able to keep a fairly close eye on things after Grandma died because Brooklyn wasn't too far from Tomkinsville. If there'd have been a problem, I could've been there in a few hours if I was needed. But playing in California? That's on the other side of the country so I'd have had to spend a whole day flying just to get to New York or Boston, then rent a car to spend more hours driving to Connecticut. Made no sense.

Then there was flying itself. Ever since that crash landing in France during the war, I just had no use for airplanes. I never worried about going up in the air when we played in Brooklyn because we took the train

everywhere on road trips. The Pennsylvania Railroad went to every city in the National League except Boston and then Milwaukee. We'd take the New Haven Railroad to play the Braves in Boston and after they moved in 1953, we'd hop the Milwaukee Road from Chicago and there we were. Playing in Los Angeles meant flying everywhere. No thanks!

EVEN THOUGH YOU'D BEEN A TAILGUNNER IN THE WAR?

When you're in a plane being shot at from the ground and then you're forced to bring that plane down at night without landing gear, it sort of changes how you look at being thousands of feet in the air with nothing to catch your fall. I had zero interest in flying ever again.

WHAT WAS THE THIRD REASON YOU DIDN'T GO TO LA?

I met the new owner, the bank lawyer, and I simply didn't like the guy. Actually, he'd been a lawyer who worked for a trust company doing foreclosures on people who couldn't pay their mortgages, including farmers like me. That put him on my wrong side to begin with.

He became a shareholder in the Dodgers when Jack MacManus had to start selling parts of the team to pay bills and once Mac got behind on some debts to that bank, the guy swooped in and forced him to settle by selling him enough shares in the team to become majority shareholder. Mac didn't really have a choice at that point.

Then this bank lawyer couldn't have been more full of himself. After the 1957 season when he'd announced the Dodgers were moving to California, he called me on the phone to talk contract for 1958. I hadn't had a great year even though we won the pennant. How good a year are you having when you're sent to the minors? I finished with a .245 average and only hit 9 homers, which was way below what I used to do.

The guy brought up all of this, told me he was going to cut my salary from $30,000 to $15,000 and I was lucky to be getting that much. I'd have

to pay my own moving expenses to California, of course. Who wants to play for someone like that? So I retired.

I'd been good with the money I made in baseball, there was money in the bank, the farm was doing okay and I was going to turn 39 in 1958. It was just time.

BUT YOU ENDED UP PLAYING ONE MORE SEASON

I did. I wasn't going to go to California and had no plans to play for anyone. I figured I'd spend the whole year on the farm until I got a call from Boston in December. It was the owner of the Red Sox, Tom Yawkey, and he wanted to sign me to a one-year contract for $18,000. At first I wasn't interested but he raised his offer to $22,000 and promised me I wouldn't have to fly for games in Kansas City, where the A's had moved in 1954. I could take the train to the other six cities in the American League.

Well, I had to listen to that and when he guaranteed the $22,000 even if I didn't last the season, I agreed. He swung a deal sending cash and a minor league outfielder to the Dodgers for my rights and I got ready for 1958 spring training in Florida, but this time in Sarasota.

WHY DID THE RED SOX WANT YOU AT AGE 39?

I don’t know. Maybe as a gate attraction? The Red Sox were coming off a third-place finish and attendance wasn't bad, almost 1.2 million. The crowds didn't really start getting big at Fenway Park until 1967 when they won the pennant in that great race with three other teams. Being from Connecticut and playing in Brooklyn for so long, I had a lot of fans in New England. That was my thought, anyway, because $20,000 was a lot to pay to a backup player.

HOW DID YOUR REAL LAST SEASON GO IN BOSTON?

Not great, but not bad either. I was a backup left fielder and first baseman, so I was behind Ted Williams and Dick Gernert. Did a lot of pinch-hitting, too, and played a little third behind Frank Malzone and right behind Jackie Jensen. The locker room was different than it had been at Ebbets, as you'd expect, but there were some pretty good guys on the team.

Once I was used to playing in the American League and getting curveballs on 3-and-2 pitches instead of fastball, I did okay. I hit something like .275 with 15 homers despite being a part-timer and not playing 11 games in KC, so I'm satisfied with that. Managed to keep my career average over .300 and I hit my 350th homer over the Green Monster against Baltimore in September.

Attendance actually went down, but not by a lot. There seemed to always be a group of people sitting on the third base side who were really loud when I came up to bat. The Red Sox came in third for the second year in a row. All in all, it was a nicer way to go out than if I'd stayed retired because the Dodgers moved and then lowballed me on a contract.

HOW WAS TED WILLIAMS TO PLAY WITH?

He was a great guy. We got along just fine because we'd both come up the same year and had flown in wartime, twice for Ted. He had problems with some fans and especially the writers, but I thought he was a good teammate. And, gee, could he ever hit. What a beautiful swing. He outhit me by 50 points and made it look easy. Ted was all about that bat.

I really got along well with Frank Malzone, too. A very quiet guy out of the Bronx. He had dignity and a pretty dry sense of humor when he let it out. Frank was my roommate on the road. Boy, could he ever snore some nights, though. After our first road trip, I bought some earplugs in Cambridge and never had a problem sleeping after that. If the worst thing you can say about a roomie is that he snores, you have a good roomie.

SO 1958 WAS DEFINITELY YOUR LAST YEAR AS A PLAYER?

No question. I could still hit but I'd slowed down so much by then, especially when I played in the outfield. I guess if they'd had the designated hitter back then I could've kept on playing another year or two, but I don't like the DH. To me, it's not a real position because I think ballplayers should play offense and defense. I guess that's the National Leaguer in me, but we all played both ways back then. No, I was done, even in semipro ball. Once I retired, I never played again. No regrets. I had a nice career.

SO YOU WERE ON THE FARM FULL-TIME IN 1959?

Well, no. After I retired as a player, Mister Yawkey asked if I'd be willing to manage one of his minor league teams in 1959. I'd never thought about it but he'd been really good to me so I told him I would take a week to think about it. I got in touch with Jocko Klein, Elmer McCaffrey and Jake Kennedy, who'd all managed in the minors. I asked about the good and the bad parts of a job like that. I'd never considered managing after I was done playing, but it sounded like a decent way to stay involved in the game for a few bucks while helping develop young players.

I got back to Mister Yawkey and we talked about where I would manage if I accepted his offer. I wanted to stay near home so we worked out a deal where I'd manage Corning, a team in the New York-Penn League. Corning is in upstate New York, not far from Tomkinsville, and it was D ball so I'd have players who were mostly in their late teens and early twenties who knew they had a lot to learn, which was good. I had enough to deal with riding buses, playing at parks with bad fields and lights and eating on the run between towns on road trips. I didn't need players who'd been around just long enough to think they knew it all. The pay wasn't great, maybe $5,000, but the GM in Cornell found me a room at a nice family's home to live in for free during homestands.

HOW WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE MANAGING IN THE MINORS?

I can't complain a lot because everyone had to live with the ballparks and bus rides, cheap hotels and lousy food. It was better than my first year as a player with Elmira in 1938, but there were hardly any days off. It seemed like my entire summer was spent living out of a suitcase, riding a bus on bumpy roads and eating hamburger after hamburger. The team did okay and we had a winning record while three of the players went on to play in the majors, but I wasn't cut out for that life so one year was enough.

AND JUST LIKE THAT, YOU WERE DONE WITH BASEBALL?

When you've spent almost all your life in baseball, you're never really done with it. Or it's never really done with you. I did spend 1960 on the farm, the first year since I started playing Legion ball in 1935 that I didn't have a game I had to be at, either as a player or a manager. I was able to spend a little less money running the farm because I did a lot of work that we used to hire out for but by the time July rolled around, I was going crazy without being involved in baseball.

WHAT DID YOU DO TO GET BACK INTO THE GAME?

I had a friend who was a sportswriter at the Hartford Courant and I gave him a call telling him I wanted to get back into baseball as a manager or coach, but without all the traveling. He said he thought he might have something for me but let him make a couple phone calls first and he'd get right back to me as soon as he had an answer.

A few days went by and he called back. He told me there was a two-year college upstate in Windsor Locks, Northern Connecticut College, that was looking for a new baseball coach. The pay was nothing like I'd even made managing Corning, but their coach had just retired and he was told the school's president and athletic director would love to talk to me.

As it turned out, I could drive from Tomkinsville to Middletown and catch a train, the New Haven-Springfield Line, that stopped in Windsor Locks, where the station was within walking distance of the college. I did

just that and spoke with the school president and the AD. After 90 minutes, including a look at the baseball field and locker rooms, we had a deal and I was the new baseball coach of the Northern Connecticut College Settlers.

As expected, the money wasn't much, $1,500 a year, but they gave me a scholarship to take full-time classes in both Fall and Winter quarters because as a coach, I had to either have at least an Associates degree or be working towards one. So now I was a college coach AND a college student.

It was halfway through the summer, which is a little late to start recruiting players, but there were 12 players coming back for their sophomore year in 1962 and the old coach left a list of high school players he'd been talking to so I started calling them after coming home. Quite a one-day road trip, but it was a life-changer for me.

HOW WAS COLLEGE BALL AFTER 20 YEARS IN THE MAJORS?

That first year was really tough because it was such a change for me. I'd been used to having a Travel Secretary make all the travel arrangements when I was with the Dodgers but now I was the Travel Secretary. Even though we rarely played out of state and were usually home the same night after playing a game or two, there was a lot of planning involved.

I also had to make sure our field was ready for games, everything from the lawn being mowed and the infield raked to foul lines being drawn. We usually had a kid or two from town help out, but it was usually me and the players doing all the groundskeeping. As I said, I had to spend a lot of time that first summer and fall talking to players about coming to NCC, on the phone or in person.

All that and I was taking classes, too. Remember, I had an Associate's degree to earn because the scholarship was part of my package. I think I might've been busier in 1960 and 1961 than I'd ever been as a ballplayer and there was still a farm to operate.

I decided it'd be better to spend money on more hours for farm hands instead of saving it by doing work myself. The college baseball season only lasted about ten weeks but running a college baseball program is an all-year thing, even at a small, two-year college with maybe 2,000 students. At least if you want to do it right.

WHAT DID YOU FOCUS ON AS A COLLEGE BASEBALL COACH?

Well, first of all, baseball is baseball, whether it's played in New York or Windsor Locks. I focused on fundamentals every year. Even though our games didn't start until late March at the earliest, we'd practice three days a week during Fall and Winter quarter, usually indoors since the weather wasn't great for work outdoors. There's only so much room inside a gym, so I came up with drills that required less space but still taught players things they had to know. Lots of repetition until they could do them in their sleep.

My overall philosophy was to pay attention to everything on the field, especially the little things, don't beat yourselves with mistakes or cheat yourselves by lack of effort. Some teams might have more talent than we did but I didn't want to see any opponent outworking us. If they did, they could expect to do a lot of running at the next practice so our players wouldn't tire out so easily next time.

I was really a nut about keeping grades up and getting degrees on time. We never had a lot of players, maybe 20 or 22 a year, but I talked to the Chamber of Commerce people and got at least partial scholarships for all of them. I'd remind the players that they were expected to work as hard in the classroom as they did on the field and if they didn't, I'd find players willing to earn that scholarship and the degree attached to it. Players in other sports had to have a 2.0 grade-point average to be eligible, but mine was 2.4.

I lost a few players that way, but they were on a college baseball team, which meant they were student-athletes. In that order. By the way, it took three years but I did earn an Associate in Science degree in Business. It has

meant a lot in running the farm as far as making sure the books make sense, plus I was holding myself to the same standards I set.

HOW LONG DID YOU COACH AT NORTHERN CONNECTICUT?

I was there for sixteen seasons between 1961 and 1976, when the college closed because there wasn't enough money to stay open. Funding had been a concern from Day One and I never asked for a raise. I knew they didn't have it and probably spent more of my own money than I was paid, although I did get rail passes because I rode from Middletown to Windsor Locks and back every day for 16 years. I did hear from the Coast Guard Academy down in New London. It was a nice honor but I'd have enough of doing things the military way during the war, so I turned them down.

None of my Northern Connecticut players reached the majors and only four played in the minors, but we had a winning record every season after my first year and every single player who stuck it out for two years earned an Associate's degree, which I'm very proud of. You don't go to college to play baseball. You go to earn a degree and be in the position to earn more money by having it. Even an AA gives you an advantage over a high school diploma in the real world.

YOU STILL WEREN'T DONE WITH BASEBALL IN 1976?

Oh, gosh no. I turned 57 that summer and that's not very old at all. I was a little tired of all the recruiting and fundraising involved at Northern Connecticut, so I was ready to scale back a little and spend more time here on the farm. After the college closed in June of 1976, I wasn't even thinking about what to do next year. I was sitting at home one evening that month listening to the radio when the phone rang.

It was Jess Moore, my old Jefferson High classmate and American Legion teammate from 40 years earlier. He said he'd taken over coaching our old Legion team, the Middletown Braves, from his dad the past few

years and would I like to come out to a game and talk to his players? That sounded like fun so I said sure and we picked a date.

I showed up before a game against Torrington and talked for about five or ten minutes, mostly about the importance of learning fundamentals, always being aware of what's happening everywhere on the field and never cheating yourself or your teammates by coasting. Things I'd tell my NCC players, who were a year or two older.

I thought that would be the end of it, although I stuck around to watch the game, but Jess caught me afterwards and asked if I'd like to help him coach the rest of the season. There were only three weeks left and things were running smoothly on the farm, so I agreed. And it was so much fun!

Sometimes you forget that most kids at the Legion level are out there mainly because they love to play. Sure, they hope to move up someplace but when you're a high schooler, it's still about the here and now and it's an honor to play on a Senior Legion team because they're kind of all-star teams with the best young players in the area. It's a big deal to them.

After the last game of the season, Jess and I went to a diner for a bite to eat. He told me he'd been coaching the Braves for almost 20 years but was ready to take a breather for a year or two, and then he asked if I'd be interested in becoming the head coach in 1977?

I was a little surprised because if anyone loved baseball more than me, it was Jess, but he said he was going to step down no matter what, although he'd be available to help coach practices and some home games. There wasn't any arm-twisting involved because I did have such a good time working with the kids and the thought of coaching the team I started out with was appealing. So I said yes.

HOW MANY YEARS DID YOU COACH LEGION BALL?

I'd intended to coach for maybe three years and call it good after I turned 60. As it turned out, though, I coached 14 seasons between 1977 and 1990 before really calling it good the year after I turned 70. It was different from college ball at Northern Connecticut and a whole lot different from the Brooklyn Dodgers, to say the least, but it was still baseball: Three strikes and you're out, three outs and the inning's over, hit the ball over the fence and you can jog around the bases and if you score more runs than the other team, you've won it. That's an oversimplification, obviously, but the game will always be the same no matter what level it's played at.

DID YOU COACH DIFFERENTLY IN LEGION THAN COLLEGE?

A little bit, but not that much. There wasn't any statewide recruiting, scholarships or eligibility requirements like you get with a college program. Other than that, not much was different: Fundamentals, play smart, play hard, don't cheat yourself or the guy next to you. Those apply anywhere.

WAS MIDDLETOWN SUCCESSFUL WHEN YOU COACHED?

The team had always been successful, all the way back to when Jess and I played for his dad. Bear in mind that "success" with the Middletown Braves was more about learning the game and how to play it better, improving as the season went along, working together as a team instead of a bunch of individuals. Things like that. Winning took care of itself.

When you're coaching a group of 16-year-olds and 17-year-olds, you want to coach them about more than baseball. You want to use baseball as a life lesson, a metaphor. These kids are going to stop playing baseball sometime. Maybe it'll be when they're 18 or 19, maybe in their 30's or even their 40's, but playing games will end for them just like it did for me. But the things a kid can learn from playing ball can stay with them for life, even when they're nowhere near a baseball diamond.

HOW DID THE BRAVES DO IN WINS AND LOSSES?

We had a winning record every season, which would last six to eight weeks a year from late May into July, depending on whether you played in the State or regional tournaments at the end. We never made it to the American Legion World Series but we never missed a State tournament. Won State and went to Regionals in 1979 and 1982, and we reached the State Final Four seven other times between 1978 and 1990. We had some good teams and we always had fun.

Just like at Northern Connecticut, none of our players reached the majors and only two got to the minors, but we had over a dozen who went on to play in college, including a couple who attended the Coast Guard Academy a few years after they talked to me about coaching them. It's a huge deal to even get admitted there because unlike the other military academies, a letter from a U.S. Senator or Representative won't help you. You have to earn it on your own.

WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST HONOR IN A LIFE OF BASEBALL?

My greatest honor in baseball? Gee. I have to think about that one. As you see, I don't keep trophies or awards out because they're all in a box up in the attic. I guess the two MVP awards would be right up there. Winning a World Series is big, as are the five pennants. Roy Tucker Night in 1945 was a big one. Playing in 12 All-Star Games was great. No Hall of Fame but lots of guys should go in ahead of me anyway. I'm very proud that all my two-year players at Northern Connecticut College earned their degrees.

I guess I'd have to say that having the little ballpark in Middletown where I played American Legion ball renamed Roy Tucker Field a couple years ago is probably the biggest honor to me. What the folks at home think of me matters the most because no matter where I've been, this is my home and these are my friends and neighbors.

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POSTGAME

I HAVE A FEW MORE QUESTIONS AND WE'LL WRAP THIS UP

No problem. Fire when ready.

YOU DON'T HAVE A TV IN YOUR LIVING ROOM. BY CHOICE?

It's by choice, yes. I had a color TV for a couple years in the 1970's, one my players at Northern Connecticut gave me as a sort of retirement present. I used it now and then but I just never liked it that much. There was nothing wrong with having a TV, but I've always preferred listening to radio. You pay attention more with a radio but it's easier to be distracted by a TV, so I gave it to one of my Legion player's parents when I heard theirs had died.

I turn on Grandma's Crosley radio over there because it still works fine after all these years and it has good sound. It only has AM and shortwave, which I've always listened to, so I broke down and bought one of those portable boomboxes, the kids call 'em, so I can listen to FM too. Music sounds a lot better on FM.

WHAT KIND OF MUSIC DO YOU LISTEN TO?

All kinds. I always liked swing music as a kid, even before it became popular. Paul Whiteman was the most popular bandleader back then but there was a station in Hartford that would play Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Bennie Moten and the other black bands for an hour every Saturday night and I always listened. They just had so much more energy. Then Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller and those guys came along and they were the popular ones. I still listen to swing.

Clyde Baldwin got me listening to jazz and I really enjoy John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Dave Brubeck, Stan Getz, Coleman Hawkins. I enjoy classical music too. Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky and those composers. I usually listen to classical music when I go to sleep. Very soothing.

I also like some rock and roll. Not the later stuff by Led Zeppelin or people like them, but folks from the Fifties like Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Carl Perkins, Chuck Berry and so on. I liked Elvis Presley when he was younger but after he went into the Army, he seemed to lose something. I'll give any kind of music a chance and if I like it, I'll listen again.

IS THERE A REASON YOU NEVER GOT MARRIED?

No one reason. I like women and dated a few but when I was playing, I never really knew if they liked me for me or for my money or status as a major league baseball player. I had teammates who'd gone through women problems because they'd read them wrong, so I learned to be cautious after a while.

Also, my life was pretty much tied between the farm and baseball, Tomkinsville and Brooklyn. It got even busier to a degree when I started coaching, although I wasn't out on the road for so long. I just didn't really have time for much dating. And let's face it. How many women really want to settle down on a farm? The ones I dated always wanted to be in New York or Boston, some big city. That's just not me at all so it would've caused trouble, sooner or later.

WHAT'S YOUR LIFE LIKE NOW?

In some ways, it's not much different than it was when I was home during the off-season. I'm able to hire a couple of hands during growing season and harvest so I don't have to do the same things outside that I did when I was in my 20's and 30's, but the farm doesn't run itself. I'll spend a couple hours every morning catching up on business at the kitchen table after breakfast, like it's been for decades.

That's after getting up, taking a shower and getting dressed, of course. Breakfast is pretty simple, a couple of poached eggs with a slice of ham on toast, a banana or an orange, that sort of thing. I never thought I'd say this, but I've learned to like eating granola and yogurt sometimes. Raz Nugent would roll over in his grave over that one.

Anyway, after breakfast, paying bills and any other paper business, I'll head outside and check on everything because that's where the money is actually made. I'll talk to the hands if it's in season to find out how things are going and if they need anything. I peek in on the hens and roosters and after all these years, I still gather the eggs and bring them in. I'll go out to the fields to see what's happening there. You know, basic farm duties.

If I need to, I'll get in that pickup truck and head to Middletown to deliver eggs to the grocer who sells them or anything else I need to do. I'll stop at the post office on my way back to pick up the mail and come home. Sometimes I'll meet some friends for lunch in Middletown or at the little diner on Main Street in Tomkinsville. Otherwise, I fix myself a couple of turkey or chicken sandwiches for lunch here along with an apple. Same thing for dinner. Soup with salad is usually it. Once I'm done with what has to be taken care of, I'll grab a book, turn on the radio and read. An exciting life, ha ha, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

SO YOU'RE A BOOK READER?

I think the term is voracious. I didn't read a lot as a kid besides baseball magazines and school books but after becoming friends with Jocko

Klein, he kind of opened my eyes to what kind of reading there is out there, especially the classics. I turned Grandma's old room into sort of a library where visitors can spend the night, ha ha. All my books are in there on a couple of bookcases. Lots of Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, Charles Dickens, some Plato and Socrates, Shakespeare. Edna Ferber is one I've read a lot of the last couple years. What a great writer, like she's right there having a conversation with you.

When I was studying for my degree at Northern Connecticut, I had to buy Norton Anthologies for my English textbooks and I've never stopped. They're a little pricey new so I'll get them at a used bookstore in Middletown, but you get so much and it's been a good way to read authors I'd never heard of. If I like 'em, I'll keep an eye out for their full books. It's a great bookstore because you can trade in your old books for credit on ones you buy. I don't have a lot of shelf space so I can keep rotating the crops, so to speak.

WHERE DO YOU STAND POLITICALLY?

I'm not really a Democrat or Republican, so I guess I'm an independent. I'm like a Democrat because I think as rich a country as we are, we're in a position to help folks without money more than we do; then I'm like a Republican because I think that the government should never spend more than we have and nothing on something that isn't working. You need to mix compassion with common sense.

Otherwise, I vote for who I think is the best candidate no matter what party they're from or whatever I believe is the best position on ballot issues. It's like I voted for Nixon in 1972 and then I voted for Carter in 1976, both from opposite parties but both considered failures now. I went with Nixon because I thought he'd done a decent job and was a better choice at the time than McGovern. Not a good man but a good politician. Then I went with Carter because I wasn't very impressed with Ford and I thought Carter would bring back a sense of deceny to the White House. Good man, but not a good politician.

When people vote because of how one party or the other tells them to vote, that's when we have trouble. How hard is it to take a little time and consider both sides before you vote? If you're really open-minded, isn't that what you should be doing anyway?

DO YOU STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOUR OLD TEAMMATES?

Yes I do, pretty regular with some of them. I try to call someone different every week. Sometimes it's a short call, sometimes we talk for an hour. It all depends.

Harry Street and I stay in touch quite a bit. I must talk with Harry once a month and those are long calls. Usually Harry does the talking, just like in 1939. He still owns his station in Erie but now his son is managing it. Harry says as long as he has money to count at the end of the month, everything's swell, ha ha.

I talk to Spike Russell every so often. He went back to North Carolina when he quit managing in 1960. I guess he'd had enough of the bank lawyer, too. Won a pennant in 1959 but finished 13 games out in fourth in 1960 so he was expected to take a big pay cut. Instead, he took a hike and first moved to Charlotte before settling down in Durham, where he was the GM and part-owner for the Carolina League team there for years. He'd always tell me, "I'm making half as much money as I was with the Dodgers, but I'm twice as happy now." That counts for something, doesn't it?

I'll call Elmer McCaffrey once in a while, too. He managed in Nashville a couple more years before deciding he'd ridden his last bus, but then what does he do but get a job with Greyhound managing their bus station there. He was given a lifetime bus pass when he retired in 1975 so he can ride a Greyhound for free anytime and anywhere he wants. We laugh about that sometimes. I'll ask him, "So where are you going to take the bus this month, Elmer?" He'll always say, "As long as there's a stewardess to

serve me a decent meal on board, I'll go anywhere." He's from Ohio, you know, but Elmer stayed in the Nashville area and still lives there.

Of course, I've lost some teammates over the years, too. I already told you about Red Allen, Raz Nugent and Clyde Baldwin. Some other guys have passed away, too. Fat Stuff Foster died of a heart attack back in 1968. Same with Tom Swanson in the early 1970's. Lester Young had a liver ailment and died in about 1965 at 40. Bobby Russell had followed Spike to Durham and was the assistant GM when he was killed in a car wreck while driving to Greensboro for a road game. I think that was in 1966.

The one that really hurt was Dave Leonard. He'd gone home to Philly after quitting the Browns' job in 1945 and spent about 10 or 15 years selling insurance, which he'd done for years during the off-season when he was a player. By 1960, his daughters had grown up and got married so it was just him and Helen at home. He was tired of sitting in an office doing the same old thing but they'd been able to save some money because Helen had worked at a bank since the girls moved out. One day, they were looking out the window of their home when it was 15 degrees outside with snow blowing all over. I guess Dave said, "I think I'm ready to move to Florida."

So they packed up their things, put their house up for sale and moved down to Sarasota, which isn't far from where the Dodgers used to have spring training in Clearwater. Once they got settled in, Dave used some of their money to start a contracting business. It was never huge, but it made money every year and he was so proud that he didn't have to answer to an owner or a GM because he WAS the owner and GM. He ran the business until he turned 70, when he turned it over to his oldest daughter and son-in-law, who moved to Bradenton and still run it. Dave lived into his 90's before he passed away a couple years ago. I went down for his funeral and saw a lot of the guys there. For that, I took a flight from LaGuardia.

HAVE YOU BEEN BACK TO BROOKLYN SINCE RETIRING?

I've gone to a couple of old-timers events there over the years and visited some old Dodgers fans a couple other times, but I don't go into the city anymore. I don't know if it's because New York has changed or I've changed or a combination of both, but there just isn't much appeal to me. I don't really enjoy big cities much anyway. I think the biggest city I go to now is Hartford or New Haven and neither of them can be more than 200,000 people. Shoot, Middletown's grown from about 25,000 when I was a kid to over 40,000 now and that even seems kind of big.

ARE YOU STILL A BASEBALL FAN?

Sure I am. I like a lot of sports. I don't watch games on TV, obviously, but I can listen to all the New York and Boston teams on the radio as well as UConn football and basketball. Shucks, even Wesleyan University in Middletown has some games on their campus station so I listen to those too. I have a daily subscription to the Hartford Courant and they've got good coverage of teams in their sports section. Even without TV, I have no problem following teams here.

DO YOU ATTEND LIVE SPORTING EVENTS?

Gosh, yes. As I said, Wesleyan University is just over in Middletown so I go to watch lots of different sports there. They're a Division III school with over two dozen programs, so I can watch football in the fall, basketball and ice hockey in the winter and baseball and softball in the spring.

Wesleyan's a small school but there's so much history there. They've been playing football and baseball at Andrus Field since the 1880's. Andrus Field is a big open area with a baseball diamond in one corner of it. There's a grandstand that they'll move back and forth, depending on which sport is in season. For football, it stands just beyond the infield on first and second base; for baseball, it's moved to foul territory on the first base side. Great seats in a beautiful setting with all the campus buildings around and you sure can't beat the price.

And during summer? I watch Middletown Braves Senior American Legion baseball, of course. One of the nice things about having the ballpark named after me is that I don't have to pay to get into the games, ha ha, but I make a contribution to the program every spring. Since I'm a veteran, I've been a member since 1948 of Legion Post 75 in Middletown, conveniently located right next to Roy Tucker Field. So, yes, I still enjoy watching sports.

COMPARE BASEBALL NOW TO WHEN YOU PLAYED IT

It wouldn't be right to compare the game or its players like that. Like I said earlier, athletes get bigger, faster and stronger every year. You may not see a difference from 1978 to 1979, for instance but if you look at the average baseball player in 1940 next to one in 1980? You can tell. Just look at the heights and weights on rosters from those years. It's staring right at you. And in sports where performance can be measured, like track and field or swimming, records are being broken every year. Lots of old-timers like me will say things like "Players in my day were better," but that's hogwash. All the available evidence in any sport shows the opposite is true.

I just prefer to keep baseball within its own time and place. Would Raz Nugent be a 20-game winner now? Would Cecil McDade hit 30 home runs now? Who knows? And, really, who cares? Razzle and Highpockets did those things when they played and that's all that matters. That's the beauty of baseball. Every era is special in its own right. Why mess with that?

WHAT WOULD YOU DO TO IMPROVE BASEBALL?

What would I do to improve baseball? Geez. I have to think about that for a moment.

I guess the first thing I'd do is ditch the designated hitter. I accept its existence but I'll never like it. How can you call something where you wake up every 45 minutes to go to the plate before you come back for another nap a "position?" Ridiculous. There's one variation on the DH I've actually seen that I could live with, though.

Back in 1972, the year before the American League began the DH, the New York-Penn League used something called the DPH, or designated pinch hitter. Before each game, a manager would write a tenth name at the bottom of the lineup card. That player could come to the plate two times during the game, anywhere in the batting order as long as it had cycled through before the second time he went up. No defensive changes.

I liked that rule because there was strategy involved for the manager. Do I send the DPH up now or should I wait? Should I send up a regular pinch-hitter for the pitcher and replace him for the next inning or send the DPH in and let the pitcher keep going for another couple innings. No, I don't like the DH but the DPH would be just fine.

Another thing I'd do is put in a pitch clock, maybe next to the scoreboard in the outfield. I know they use one during the national semipro tournament in Wichita every summer. Why not use it in organized baseball? Some pitchers just dawdle out there and it drags a game on forever. I'd say give them 15 seconds to throw a pitch from the time they get the ball on the mound from the catcher or from an infielder after a hit. If they haven't thrown a pitch when time expires, that's a ball.

To be fair, same rule applies to batters, like this Mike Hargrove guy. If he's not ready for a pitch in 15 seconds, it's a strike. And give teams 90 seconds to trade places in the field after the third out ends the last half-inning. A minute and a half is plenty of time to grab your mitt, hit the field and be ready on defense.

Finally, I'd cut back on all the travel these players have to go through. Instead of three-game series from city to city, let 'em play seven-game series from Tuesday through Saturday with a Sunday doubleheader. There are 12 teams per league right now so if everyone plays a balanced home-and-away schedule against each opponent, that's 14 games per opponent over 22 weeks per season, or 154 games. You're taking half as many flights as you are now but only losing eight games on the schedule.

That may sound too radical for a lot of people, but think about it. Players get a lot more rest because they're going from city to city once a week instead of two or three times a week while a team's travel costs get cut down because they're only taking 22 flights per season instead of over 40 flights like now. Also, if there's a rainout on a Wednesday, there are still four days to make it up instead of having to shoehorn a game in Cleveland between series in Chicago and Detroit later in the season.

Anyway, if I was the King of Baseball, that's what I'd think of doing.

LAST QUESTION: HOW SHOULD FANS REMEMBER YOU?

I guess I'd like them to remember Roy Tucker as a guy who loved playing baseball. A guy who gave them a good effort every time they paid to go to the ballpark or even sat down with a TV dinner in their living room to watch a game on the tube. A guy who tried to represent his team and the city they played for with honor and never did anything to embarrass anyone. A guy who came back after getting hurt defending the country during World War II and played another 13 seasons at a high level. And someone who didn't take a single college class until he was in his 40's and earned a degree.

You know, I did have some tough breaks along the way, from losing both my parents before I was out of high school to hurting my pitching arm after starting out 15-0 as a rookie and never pitching again to getting injured and captured by the Nazis during the war to having to take over running a family farm while playing baseball full-time for nine years. That's a lot to deal with before you turn 40, but it all made me appreciate what I had then and especially what I have now. I'm a lucky guy to have lived a good life and had a long, successful career in baseball as a player and a coach for over 50 years.

I'd say that all things considered, I did pretty well for a kid from Tomkinsville.

Postscript

Royal Forrest Tucker died of natural causes on Juy 19, 2019 at home in Tomkinsville, Connecticut, one day before his 100th birthday. His nephew, Forrest Tucker V, was awarded power of attorney for the farm that had been in their family for two centuries and sold it to a neighbor who owned adjacent acreage. The farmhouse was razed but the barn Roy taught himself to pitch in remains standing and in use.

When he retired from the Boston Red Sox following the 1958 season, Roy Tucker had 2,505 hits (including 353 homers and 1,309 RBIs) for a . 315 career average. He played in 12 All-Star Games, was the National League postseason all-star right fielder 8 times, won two Most Valuable Player awards and played for five pennant-winners winning one World Series championship.

He has yet to be selected as a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York.